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THE WORK OF ART AS A SYMBOL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

Susanne Langer claims that works of art are themselves symbols. This study outlines the main tenets of her argument as it is found in Philosophy in a New Key and Feeling and Form, and contends that the case for "presentational symbols" cannot be maintained. Works of art may seem to refer beyond themselves to their "meanings," and in this respect their function seems to be symbolic. However, it is argued here that to call works of art symbols perpetrates a misconception of their essential nature.

The first chapter involves an analysis of Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms, and discusses the logical feasibility of the wide range of symbolic reference inherent in this theory, without referring directly to works of art. The second chapter assesses the legitimacy of works of art as presentational symbols.

The last chapter attempts a reconstruction by outlining briefly the role of symbolism in art. Though art objects may not be symbols, the contribution of symbolic elements to the aesthetic experience cannot be denied. In the concluding section an attempt is made to answer the question, "If a work of art is not a symbol, then what is it?" It is maintained that art is many things, so diverse that all that can be said of this family of "things" is that they heighten our consciousness, sharpen our vision, and add imaginative content to life.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LOGIC OF SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

INTRODUCTION

Studies in symbolism carried on in the early decades of this century particularly by Ernst Cassirer, have exercised a remarkable influence on contemporary aesthetics. Cassirer's investigations concerned the entire range of human conception. His conclusions have been taken up by philosophers, psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists, to mention only a few. Each has applied the symbolic "mantle" to his own field. Cassirer's point stated very briefly is that--

"Human intelligence begins with conception, the prime mental activity; the process of conception always culminates in symbolic expression. A conception is fixed and held only when it has been embodied in a symbol. So the study of symbolic forms offers a key to the forms of human conception. The genesis of symbolic forms--verbal, religious, artistic, mathematical, or whatever modes of expression there be--is the odyssey of the mind."¹

Susanne K. Langer has made the most thorough application of these fruitful ideas to aesthetics. Her work is contained primarily in two books, Philosophy in a New Key, and Feeling and Form, which should be read as if they were separate volumes of the same work. Two later books are merely supplementary: Problems of Art is a compilation of Mrs. Langer's collected lectures delivered since the publication of Feeling and Form, and Reflections on Art, of which she is the editor, brings together the comments of many

artists, critics and aestheticians in support of her general theory.

Very broadly, her thesis is that studies in symbolism have indicated a common root in language, myth, ritual and art. Through the process of "symbolic transformation" the mind conceives symbols and expresses them either in "discursive" or in "presentational" forms, language being the result of discursive symbolism, and art, religion and mythology being the manifestation of presentational forms. If these conclusions are correct; if presentational symbols bear the significant similarities and differences to the discursive symbols of science and everyday life, if they convey the meaning of the "forms of feeling," her thesis could conceivably amount to a meridian of time in the history of aesthetics. One review of Feeling and Form, as a matter of fact, is entitled, "This May Be The Book."²

Mrs. Langer's thesis is clearly within the category of the so-called "expressive" theories of art, and therefore Philosophy in a New Key is a unique book not because it propounds a new theory, but because it develops an expressive theory within the framework of a general theory of symbolism. First, a theory of symbolism is laid thoroughly, and then the thesis concerning artistic form is interwoven. In Feeling and Form the theory is expanded in generous detail to include all the major art forms.

At least one other theory has maintained that the aesthetic object functions as a sign or symbol--that of Charles W. Morris.³ Richard Rudner classes all theories in which the aesthetic object is taken as a communicator or vehicle of communication as "semiotic."⁴ This includes Dewey, Santayana and others who argue that the work of art is an "expressive" object. The distinction between all other semiotic theories and those of Langer and Morris, however, is the fact that the latter writers commit themselves self-consciously to a semiotic approach. They both contend that the aesthetic object "stands for" an emotion or idea in the mind of the artist. Morris' "iconic sign" is designed to function similar to Langer's presentational symbol. Morris therefore relates art to language, but he does not make an effort to correlate his theory directly with the broader conclusions of Cassirer that art is one symbolic mode--one of the many streams flowing from the fountain of human experience. Mrs. Langer's work has this broader base, and includes a "studio approach" as well. It is firmly rooted in the arts, making direct reference particularly to music. Whether Mrs. Langer is or has been a creative or performing artist as well as philosopher, I do not know. It is clear, nevertheless, that she has nurtured a keen interest in the arts and aesthetic problems over many years. Morris, on the other hand, is essentially a philosopher-psychologist whose

interest in the function of signs led him to relate semiosis and aesthetics. I have therefore chosen to concentrate on Mrs. Langer's theory. It is the purpose of this study to test the workability of her claims, first in the consideration of symbols themselves, and then concerning works of art. Mrs. Langer is fully aware that she uses the word "symbol" in a broader sense than is usual. Her reason for doing so is simple enough--works of art are symbols of a modality other than ordinary discourse. The critics of her theory have been particularly concerned with her claim that art objects are symbols. Ernest Nagel in the initial review of Philosophy in a New Key declares: "What is not clear from Mrs. Langer's account is the precise sense in which 'presentational symbols' are symbols."⁵ Melvin Rader expressed similar concern in his review of Feeling and Form: "I question whether 'symbol' is the right word to apply to a work of art."⁶ One of the central purposes of this study is to make clear the nature and extent of the difference between the function of a genuine symbol and a work of art. Mrs. Langer herself confessed in 1956⁷ that this difference is greater than she had realized when Philosophy in a New Key was published. However, I do not think she has been willing to admit the implication of this later confession. The dependence of her theory on presentational symbol is absolutely central, it seems to me.

Before the work of art can be discussed with understanding in Mrs. Langer's context, we must be clear about some of the pillars on which her theory stands. The most important is the principle or process of symbolic transformation.

SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION

Ernst Cassirer struck a new note in the study of the theory of knowledge when his three volume The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms was published in the twenties. The theory of knowledge became a theory of the activity of the mind, and in it he gave as much attention to the imagination and the forms of feeling as to the traditional concern for sense perception, and "fact." Cassirer observed that in language two entirely different modes of thought are evident, yet in both, the mind is powerful and creative. Thought is either discursive and logical, or it is creative and imaginative, yet the two modes are not foreigners to each other; they are twins whose birth occurred prior to the dawn of history. Language is the result of the practical and logical endeavors of the mind, and myth is the earliest form of the mind's imaginative activity. Thus, reason is not a primitive gift or endowment, but is a human achievement. When language appeared in history, symbols were already mature to the point of having devised logic--the greatest of the

symbolic modes. Note, however, that the achievement of reason is a unique human accomplishment, entirely distinct from the sign-using mental attainments of animals.

The primary difference between myth and language lies in the fact that they take opposite positions concerning "fact." Myth is content with figurative representation. It makes no demand to break from magic. "It reaches religious and poetic heights; but the gulf between its conceptions and those of science never narrows the least bit."⁸ Discursive language on the other hand, is bound on one side to practical pursuits and therefore it broke away from figurative ideas and developed a preoccupation with facts.

Traditionally the theory of knowledge has concerned itself with facts and man's way of thinking about them, and knowing them. Myth, poetry and religion had nothing to contribute to knowledge because there was no way to relate them to science and truth. Thus, Cassirer's great contribution was to show that man's cultural and spiritual background is much more than merely emotional indulgence--it springs from the same source as logical thought, and is a part of human activity as necessary as the need to communicate through language. "The philosophy of mind involves much more than a theory of knowledge; it involves a theory of prelogical conception and expression, and their final culmination in reason and factual knowledge."⁹

It was this view which Susanne Langer espoused because she found in it a new insight into "our whole picture of human mentality." This is the New Key she speaks of.

The chapter on symbolic transformation in Philosophy in a New Key begins with a carefully chosen quotation from D. G. James: "The vitality and energies of the imagination do not operate at will; they are fountains, not machinery."¹⁰ There is a world of meaning here. Psychologists who feel that all human activity including the operations of the mind may be entirely explained in terms of satisfying basic needs, and that these needs are merely a refinement of animal needs, are deluded. In some ways human minds operate similarly to those of animals but in at least three instances, man's mental activity is not strictly utilitarian as that of animals seems to be: 1) In ritual and magic, symbolic representations are prevalent. Our language would be more realistic than in fact it is, if our needs were nothing more than a refinement of those of lower animals. 2) Our serious attitude toward art is founded in other than utilitarian principles. 3) The mind never sleeps, it never ceases its symbolizing activity, even when the body sleeps, though during a dream it serves no practical purpose. These three points are evidence that the human mind in creating symbols is functioning entirely differently from the mind of an

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animal that learns to recognize and respond to signs.* The evidence indicates that symbols did not evolve from signs, but rather, that the human mind is doing much more than merely satisfying the usual bodily needs when it forms a symbol. Therefore, the "symbolic" theory claims that human mental processes are involved with basic needs,"but of characteristically human needs." We must recognize a fundamental difference in needs between man and his "zoological" brethren. It is not important for our purposes to decide whether the naturalist's or the religionist's account of this difference is the most plausible.** Mrs. Langer states her belief--or disbelief--that man has no supernatural essence, but adds a word of heresy, that he has a basic need which other creatures do not have, and that is the need of symbolization. She says that "the symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time. Sometimes we are aware of it, sometimes we merely find its results, and realize that certain experiences have passed through our brains and have been digested there."¹¹

* The distinction between signs, signals and symbols will be discussed in the following section.

** The naturalist claims that man is the highest animal; the religionist, that he is the lowest spirit, and that a gulf of unbridgeable width separates him from the animals.

We cannot deny that the mind works continuously; that "our merest sense-experience is a process of formulation." But why does it not rest when the organism rests? Strangely enough, it does much more than merely transmit the experiences of the sleeper. It continues to create ideas, to "transmit experiences into symbols, in fulfillment of a basic need to do so." And this transmission involves all experience; no experience is meaningful or understood unless it is symbolized. Cassirer makes this clear: "It is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely made, but fixed in consciousness."¹² Thus the mind changes the sense impressions it receives; it moulds them into symbolic patterns of its own design. It is not merely a "super-switchboard"; it is more like a transformer. And thus the expression "symbolic transformation" becomes meaningful. The very quality which sets man apart from the animals is the fact that his mind is a better transformer than it is transmitter. As an instrument it is a fountain, producing ideas more or less spontaneously. It is not a machine.

We may ask with justification at this point, whether all the forms produced by the mind are expressible. The answer in Philosophy in a New Key is a qualified "yes." Ideas or feelings are expressed in two symbolic modes--the discursive and the presentational, or non-discursive. The qualification to be added is that we have no assurance that

all of the symbols created in the process of forming experiential data are expressed in these two modes. There may be others of which we are not yet aware. Or it may be that some ideas are formed and never expressed in symbols--a possibility which Mrs. Langer avoids mentioning. The important thing to notice is that myth, ritual, religion and art are all the result of the symbolic transformation of the forms of feeling.

It is perhaps naive to ask why the forms created clamour for expression. Like our concept of space and time, which is known only through experience, and yet must have been prior to experience, we know of the mind's symbolic predisposition only through inquiring concerning the origin of symbols like the words of language. Mrs. Langer has given perhaps as complete an explanation as is possible. She says simply that since "all registered experience tends to terminate in action, it is only natural that a typically human function should require a typically human form of overt activity; and that is just what we find in the sheer expression of ideas."¹³ This is an adequate account in relation to language because it does have man's "love of talk" to recommend it. That ritual is as natural a part of daily life is more difficult to accept. Mrs. Langer claims that ritual is everywhere among us, even involving our eating habits.

I think we can agree with Cassirer to the extent that the evidence seems to indicate that the field of semantics is wider than that of language. There is ample evidence to encourage a more thorough investigation of Cassirer's claim that--

"In discursive thought, the particular phenomenon is related to the whole pattern of being and of process; with ever tightening, ever more elaborate bonds it is held to that totality. In mythic conception, however, things are not taken for what they mean indirectly, but for their immediate appearance; they are taken as pure presentations, and embodied in the imagination."¹⁴

Two questions are crying for a hearing: 1) What is the relation between the forms created by the mind and the symbols expressed as language or works of art? or in other words, How is the word "tiger" related to its mental conception? And 2) What precisely is the distinction between discursive and presentational symbols? The principle of symbolic transformation will return again and again as the assessment of Mrs. Langer's theory is made. We may justifiably leave it for the moment, to consider symbols more specifically.

WORD-SYMBOLS AND LANGUAGE

A. SIGNS, SIGNALS AND SYMBOLS

Man is not the only sign-using animal. A dog will prick up his ears at the mention of his master's name, or at

the sound of his foot-fall. The opening of the refrigerator door will bring the cat from the living room at a purposeful pace. The faint aroma of tobacco smoke will warn a wild animal that man approaches. In these instances animals are responding to signs. The human mind functions easily at an unconscious level in ways similar to this also. We do not have to ask ourselves why the street is wet, or what made it so. We observe that the pavement glistens, the trees are dripping, the air smells freshly washed--obviously it has rained. It is usual to distinguish between this kind of responding to signs and the conscious variety of responding of which the familiar \$ sign is an example. Susanne Langer defines a sign as that which "...indicates the existence--past, present, or future--of a thing, event, or condition."¹⁵ The important word in that definition is indicates. Carefully combed ringlets indicate that a child is well groomed; a low sun in the west signifies (indicates) the approach of night.

A symbol, on the other hand, points beyond itself, it stands for something, it is "that which means." The ring of the telephone means that someone is calling; the letters t-a-b-l-e mean the familiar flat-topped object found in kitchens. Notice that in this context it is inappropriate to refer to a sign as meaning something. Signs indicate or signify; symbols mean. The great complexity of human

experience has resulted in myriads of symbols which have in recent years been studied from many different points of view including that of the linguist, logician, sociologist, psychologist, biologist, philosopher, and many others. Philip Wheelwright has identified a few of the kinds of symbols and has pointed to a common property among them. "There are plain and fancy symbols, private and public, emotional and intellectual, verbal and pictorial, serious and playful, religious and scientific, symbols in art and symbols in everyday life. What they all have in common is the property of being more in intention than they are in existence."¹⁶ (author's italics). A symbol is, in this respect, different from either signs or signals. In Wheelwright's terminology signs are natural phenomenon like dripping trees which indicate that it has rained, while signals are unnatural or accidental things such as the opening of the refrigerator which evokes a response from the cat. A symbol, on the other hand, "...invites consideration rather than overt action."⁷ Wheelwright follows Susanne Langer in defining symbol this way. She writes,

"Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for the conception of objects. To conceive a thing or a situation is not the same thing as to "react toward it" overtly, or to be aware of its presence. In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly "mean." Behaviour toward conceptions is what words normally evoke; this is the typical process of thinking."¹⁸

In Philosophy in a New Key (1942) Mrs. Langer distinguishes primarily between signs and symbols. However, in Feeling and Form (1953) she had second thoughts about the appropriateness of "sign" in the earlier work. C. W. Morris had distinguished between signals and symbols in Signs, Language and Behaviour (1946), and Mrs. Langer adopts this usage in her later works thus using "signal" where she had previously used "sign", even though it creates a discrepancy in terminology between her two books. There is particular advantage in the signal-symbol distinction because "sign" is thus available as a generic term. I have adopted this usage.

A symbol might be compared to a small "off-on" wall switch which seems to possess the power to bring light from a distant lamp without being in any obvious way connected with it. The spoken word "tiger" evokes something in the mind. What it is that comes to mind, and how this mental conception is related both to the symbol and to the object represented or symbolized will now occupy our attention.

B. SYMBOLS, CONCEPTIONS AND OBJECTS

As an account of the origin of language Genesis leaves much to be desired, but it points nevertheless to a very basic fact of human nature: it was man, not God, who named every living thing. We have seen that the mind of early man had not only the capacity, but the need to symbolize the

things around him. With symbols he was then able to communicate with other men, and to think about a thing in its absence. This symbolizing activity is one of the two fundamental aspects of man's character referred to by Aristotle in his familiar distinction between practical and contemplative reason. On the one hand man is a maker of decisions; he is able to adjust his life in accordance with his reflections on ultimate ends; on the other, he is a symbolizing animal. He assigns names to things, he holds up pieces of his experience by means of symbols for further scrutiny, not to be viewed for what they are in themselves, but for what they suggest--for what they mean. Indeed, the human mind cannot be separated from the process of symbolization.

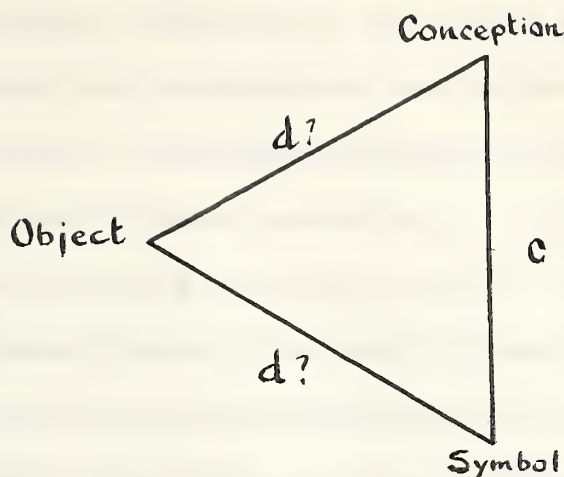
How, then, do we account for the relationship between the mind and symbols? How is the word "tiger" related to its mental conception? We may take Wittgenstein at face value and say that "one name stands for one thing, and another for another thing, and they are connected together."¹⁹ But this, taken literally, is certainly inadequate. We may think that one name stands for one thing, etc., but it is extremely difficult to determine just what it is that a symbol presents to the mind. If it were precisely one thing, it should be easily identifiable. It is true that when we hear the word "tiger" we do not become immediately fearful,

expecting a well-known animal of the cat family to appear suddenly. This is what is meant by saying that the word is not a signal, but a symbol which stands for something; it "invites consideration rather than overt action." However, to say that a word evokes the thought of its object, or its image, is inadequate. If this is true, it cannot be a complete account because many things other than the word "tiger" prompt me to think of one, and an image of a tiger that would include some detail of its characteristics is not always formed by hearing the word. A symbol therefore, does not stand in a direct, closed relation to its object; it does not evoke the same response each time it is heard. Bertrand Russell²⁰ discussed the difficulties of the "object-language" and pointed emphatically to the fact that the actual conception of a symbol and the reaction to it depends to a certain extent on the hearer's ability to understand it, and on the entire situation and context in which the symbol appears. The word "tiger" might, for instance, direct my mind at different times to the jungles of India, to an old school yell, to Kipling's stories, to a college classmate who was given this nickname, or to the cat family of animals. It is obviously inappropriate to claim that the symbol t-i-g-e-r represents all of these quite unrelated ideas. If one name stands for one conception, which of the thoughts evoked is the correct one?

Mrs. Langer seems to dissolve this problem by distinguishing between connotation and denotation, and then claiming that they each refer to the same individual object or conception. All words, as symbols, she says, have both connotation and denotation. The connotation of a word is the conception with which it is associated. "In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly 'mean'."²¹ (Langer's italics) A symbol conveys a concept, and the imagination dresses this skeleton into a "private, personal conception." Thus, a conception may be called a "sensory image" which has a certain form or concept in it. To understand a word we must somehow "see" (have an image of) the form in the conception.

The denotation of a word, on the other hand, is the object which the connotation fits. A proper name, "John," denotes a certain person. The word "hockey" denotes hockey because it (the word) is correlated in the mind with a conception which fits an actual and specific kind of game.

From this account, it would seem that there is a three-way correlation between symbols, conceptions, and objects, which might be assigned to the angles and sides of an equilateral triangle.



The relation between a symbol and its associated conception is called connotation (side "c" of the triangle). "The connotation of a word is the conception it conveys."²² It is a sense-image having a form in common with the object it symbolizes. Denotation is not so easily diagramed. Mrs. Langer says in one place that "a name above all, denotes something."²³ This is a symbol-object relation in which S is said to denote O. But we are told that the relation is not actually a two term one, rather, "S is coupled for a certain subject, with a concept that fits O."²⁴ Thus, we may paraphrase with Welsh, "A word denotes an object when it is associated with a conception that fits the object."²⁵ And Welsh insists that this is simply the connotation relation over again, and therefore nothing is accomplished by denotation in Mrs. Langer's theory. In

other words, Welsh would remove the side from our triangle which connects symbol and object, and would then route "denotation" along the round-about course from symbol to conception to object. There are two points, however, that Welsh has neglected to take account of: 1) The connotative relation need not involve an object at all. Mrs. Langer is quite clear about this.* The word "frangipanni," for example, may connote a private conception of any kind, and it may be somewhat later or never that we learn that the word denotes an exotic tropical flower. Welsh's criticism of Langer does not allow this important distinction. 2) It is appropriate to say simply, "The word 'pen' denotes the object I am writing with." That is to say, without investigating the relation of the object and its symbol we can assert that the one denotes the other. On inquiry, we may find (and will find) that they are related through a relation which the mind has imposed, but this discovery does not cause me henceforth to say, "The word 'pen' is related by my mind to the instrument I am writing with." Rather, I would continue making the original assertion, the very thing that would be expected, i.e., "pen" denotes pen. Thus, the object-symbol side of the triangle must not be removed.

* See particularly pages 52-53 of Philosophy in a New Key.

Paul Welsh deals a blow to Mrs. Langer's theory which is much more vigorous than his claim that denotation is identical with connotation. Before outlining the argument, however, it would be appropriate to turn to some general criticisms of the image theory of meaning. Mrs. Langer's account of connotation is a variation of this theory. It claims that we know the meaning of a word when we have an image of what it symbolizes. The problem, of course, is to account for the many people who claim to have no images when they think, talk or read. It is a well known, and oft demonstrated fact that our minds function differently in some areas of mental activity. Some people, for instance, perceive the number series as a pattern of quite specific shape and can report the position of a number on their private diagrammatic line. They do so by pointing to a position in space. Psychologists tell us that about one person in fifty sees numbers in a positional series of some kind and these few are often quite unaware that not everyone thinks of numbers in a similar way. Perhaps the majority of people understand words by "seeing" images; nevertheless, many do not, for unaccountable reasons.

Another problem is that if an image is associated with each word, it need not be the same image for each person who hears it, or uses it. It is possible also that different words might call up the same image, but surely

we would not want to say they had the same connotation. The image theory is beset with problems in dealing with words such as "but," "not," "because," and many others like these. No images are assignable to these words. Their meanings cannot be identified in terms of images at all.

Mrs. Langer does not worry about the conception of "not." She does, however, have answers for the other points. As outlined above, the strict identification of connotation and denotation with one definite, individual object allows her to say that if two people understand a word, they will have the same image of the object to which the word refers. The difficulty of maintaining this position in conjunction with the rest of her theory will come up again.

Paul Welsh's most stinging criticism arises from his observation that whether we see images or not, the process of understanding in Mrs. Langer's theory requires an interpretation.²⁶ He noticed that even Mrs. Langer's idea of conception is a symbol which "needs to be interpreted." We must interpret the symbol "tiger"; we must also interpret the conception "jungles of India" as it relates to "tiger." Notice that unless I already know the meaning of the word "tiger," I cannot interpret the image "jungles of India" in this context. Welsh has thus shown that Mrs. Langer's theory is lost in circularity; "If the 'meaning' of the

word was its image conception, I could never understand the word until I had interpreted the conception. But I could never interpret the conception unless I knew what the word meant."²⁷ He recommends dropping conceptions from the theory and merely understanding words.

Paul Kecskemeti's very perceptive considerations of meaning²⁸ show that when we come to consider the rules of syntax through which words are related in language, we find other evidence which seems not to fit in with the image theory of meaning. We need not have a profound knowledge, or clear image of a thing in order to employ the symbol which relates to it. A person may have a thorough acquaintance with tigers, their habits and characteristics, and yet he may not know the symbol for them. On the other hand, one may know the meaning of a symbol and the rules of syntax by which it functions in language, without being able to say very much about the thing to which it refers. We normally test a person's knowledge of the meaning of a word by observing whether or not he can make appropriate responses involving it. At the zoo one may not be able to identify the appropriate animal, yet he may reply, "I am not sure whether that is a tiger or a cheeta, but I would expect tigers to look very much like that." He is uncertain of the specific object to which a word refers, but he is not confused concerning its function in language.

He can make a meaningful response to the question, "Are tigers fierce?" whether or not he has faced such animals. Words must refer to certain general conceptions in our experience, but the fact that words (particularly thing-words, i.e., tigers, houses, atoms) can become useful symbols in one's vocabulary without having a clear idea of their referents indicates that the function and meaning of symbols is determined by the rules of language as well as by knowledge of the objects symbolized. The idea of a tidy one-to-one correlation between symbols and things is misleading.

As an example of the broad interpretation that must be given to Mrs. Langer's account of the symbol-conception-object relation consider the child who learns to use symbols meaningfully before he associates words with specific things. He may hear his parents call him a baby elephant, and may refer to himself in these terms, though he may have had no opportunity to connect the appropriate object with the word. His use of "baby elephant" has some conception associated with it in his mind because his babbling, "Elephant, elephant, elephant" is different from his calling himself a baby elephant. In other words he seems to be employing discursive language. His reaction is different from usual emotive behavior. Assuming that the child's expression is not nonsense, what object would Mrs. Langer say relates to the child's conception of the symbol? She is committed to a four

term symbol-function involving: subject, symbol, conception, and object.* If anyone of these terms is missing, communication will be incomplete. This definition is adequate providing that "object" covers a very broad area of things. In the case of the child she must say either that he talks nonsense, or that there is an object in the child's mind to be identified. To what, then does the conception refer? It may refer to the symbol itself--to the sound of the word, I should think. If Mrs. Langer will admit this kind of "object" to her four term definition, her definition will stand. Notice, however, that the rigorous one-to-one relation between symbols and things which one might naturally infer from Philosophy in a New Key, has been weakened somewhat.

C. LANGUAGE

It will be impossible to give any detailed consideration of language here. I will merely outline Mrs. Langer's general theory of language, and will draw attention particularly to points which will have relevance in later discussions of works of art. A few key statements have been chosen from the text of Philosophy in a New Key, to provide a very sketchy outline of Langer's point concerning language, and in some instances to point to key problems in her position.

* In the earlier triadic outline, the subject--a thinking thing--was inferred.

1. "Given the word, and the thought of a thing through the word, how did language rise from a sheer atomic conglomeration of symbols to the state of a complex relational structure, a logical edifice, such as it is among all tribes and nations on earth?"²⁹

Philosophy in a New Key includes a very interesting and thoroughly documented chapter on language. It is concerned entirely with answering the above question. Following Cassirer's lead, this chapter gives ample evidence of the remarkable human phenomenon of holding on to objects by means of symbols. Cassirer concluded from his investigations that "it is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely made, but fixed in consciousness. What the mind has once created, what has been culled from the total sphere of consciousness, does not fade away again when the spoken word has set its seal upon it and given it definite form."³⁰ Mrs. Langer adds her comment that this symbolizing activity "is so elementary that language has grown up on it."³¹ Animals have no language, no matter how complicated are the signals they learn to respond to. Human beings--all of them--on the contrary, have language of a very high order.

The idea of the human mind functioning as a creative agent in culling certain experiences away for special formulation is a pregnant one, it seems to me. A misconception must be avoided, however, in the application of this principle. We must not assume that human experience prior

to this culling and symbolic formulation is entirely diffuse and unintelligible, of a level no higher than the dog who reacts to signals. Helen Keller's remarkable account of the occasion when the mystery of language was revealed to her³² is indeed a valuable affidavit, in two directions. It accounts, on the one hand, for the capacity of the human mind to symbolize its experience and to use symbols as instruments of thought, but it also indicates the very high level of experience enjoyed even by this unusually handicapped child prior to the dawn of language. There must have been other experiences which approached the level of symbolic realization for she writes, "I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten--a thrill of returning thought." My point is that a definitive white-black contrast, a now-you-have-it-now-you-don't picture of language is misconceived. The mind is continually striving to cull meaningful, formable experiences from the total consciousness. It forms symbols, adds to their content, sharpens their reference, deepens their meaning continually. I feel certain that Mrs. Langer would agree that there are degrees of sharpness or depth of symbolic thought. Her emphasis, however, is toward making a wide gulf, a distinct difference between the language-using operation of the mind, and any other kind of human experience. The reason for this becomes obvious when we consider that her main endeavor is to account for a second mode of symbolism.

2. "Grammatical structure ... has a symbolic mission."³³

Language is certainly much more than a collection of thing-words. Mrs. Langer recommends constructing a sentence out of successive words in the alphabetical column of the dictionary, as evidence of the necessity of the rules of syntax. Grammar, she says,

"...ties together several symbols, each with at least a fragmentary connotation of its own, to make one complex term, whose meaning is a special constellation of all the connotations involved. What the special constellation is, depends on the syntactical relations within the complex symbol, or proposition."³⁴

Notice that every word has at least a fragmentary connotation. This might seem to be a partial answer to our earlier question concerning the "image" in the conception of a word like "because." It is not clear in the above account, though what connotation such words have. They may seem to refer to some thing in context, but Mrs. Langer says that each has its own connotation, individually and presumably, even in isolation, and that each makes its particular contribution to the "one complex term." This complex term is itself a symbol, and the structure of the proposition (complex term) has special relevance. The words in a sentence convey meaning not only individually, but in the order in which they are arranged as well. Consider the

variants of the four words "Jack caught a fish" for example. If "a fish" is regarded as one term, six variations are possible: 1) Jack caught a fish. 2) Jack a fish caught. 3) Caught a fish, Jack? 4) Caught Jack a fish? 5) A fish Jack caught. 6) A fish caught Jack. We might add a seventh illegitimate (according to the rules laid down) but irresistible variant: 7) Caught a jack-fish! I venture to claim that all seven of these statements might appear meaningful in ordinary discourse. Mrs. Langer's claim that grammatical structure has a symbolific mission is certainly obvious in these examples, if by symbolific mission she means that the total sentence is itself a symbol. And this she does affirm (see above quotation.) However, a major difficulty arises when we begin accounting for the way in which propositions relate to the world.

3. "A proposition is a picture of a structure--
the structure of a state of affairs."³⁵

Mrs. Langer is here reaffirming the doctrine of "picturing" as it was advanced in Russell's Logical Atomism and confirmed by Wittgenstein in the Tractatus. It seems strange for her to advance a theory that has received such searching criticism and was in fact rejected by Wittgenstein shortly after the publication of the Tractatus in 1919. Several pages of the chapter "The Logic of Signs and Symbols" (Philosophy in a New Key) read like a summary

of the picturing theory written by an ardent supporter of Logical Atomism. Gestalt psychology and Cassirer's The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms strengthen her hand somewhat, but still, she makes no effort to reformulate the theory or to answer the charges against it, with the exception of the minor alteration of calling the "picture" a symbol. An analysis of this doctrine and the problems connected with it is essential in this study because the picturing theory later proves to be very useful when Mrs. Langer talks of works of art.

Wittgenstein's original position may be outlined as follows: The real link between language and reality lies in the relation of so-called atomic propositions to atomic facts. This relation is very much like that holding between a picture and the scene it represents. In a picture of an object or scene, there is a kind of correspondence between the parts of the picture and the parts of the object or scene.* Two orders of agreement are necessary: 1) the elements or parts must be present in the picture; and 2) their form or arrangement must be the same in both the scene and the picture. An atomic fact, the Tractatus claims, "... is a combination of objects (entities, things) ... The

* It perhaps should be noted that Wittgenstein's "picturing" was not simply a mirror image. He claimed that even a gramophone record was in a sense a picture of a score. Mrs. Langer is careful to point this out.

configuration of objects forms the atomic fact."³⁶ And a sentence (sentential sign) is also a "fact"; it is a combination of elements, namely, words. This sort of fact is therefore capable of "picturing" the non-verbal facts, and it is through this principle that language can refer to the world, can mean something other than itself.

Mrs. Langer's account of the structure of language and its relation to reality agrees almost exactly. She claims that sentences are complex terms made up of symbols, as we have seen. She relates propositions to facts and even refers to the same two orders of agreement between pictures and scenes, or propositions and facts:

"A proposition fits a fact not only because it contains names for the things and actions involved in the fact, but also because it combines them in a pattern analogous, somehow, to the pattern in which the named objects are "in fact" combined. A proposition is a picture of a structure--the structure of a state of affairs."³⁷

Let us return now to Jack and the fish he caught. What are the facts pictured by each of the seven sentences? The picture theory is forced to say that some different arrangement of objects and/or relations between them hold for each sentence. A different analogous pattern for "Jack caught a fish" and "A fish caught Jack" is conceivable, but what alteration in pattern would indicate the difference between "Jack caught a fish" and the question "Caught a fish, Jack?"

or again, "Did Jack catch a fish?" What patterns would account for the difference between the exclamation, "Am I lost!" and the question "Am I lost?" The difference is one of voice inflexion--which would be difficult to picture I should imagine. We require more explanation than is given in statements such as, "A temporal order of words stands for a relational order of things," or "A sentence is a symbol for a state of affairs, and pictures its character."³⁸ Presumably this account is designed to show the difference in meaning, the difference in emphasis between two statements such as "the green-eyed dragon" and "the dragon with green eyes." In the English language the first phrase places emphasis on the green eyes; the second on the beast itself, which, somewhat incidentally, has green eyes. But Mrs. Langer is surely aware that different languages use a different temporal order of words to stand for the same relational order of things--the same state of affairs.

It is implausible that states of affairs can be pictured at all. Facts cannot be like, or even unlike a sentence in structure because they are not collections of anything in the way that a sentence is a collection of words, or noises. In the statement "I am angry" no relation of resemblance need hold between my state of anger and the words. Again, it is not at all clear how a false proposition would be pictured. And finally, what part does the

notion of picturing and structural similarity have to do with the explanation of language, anyway? Urmson says none at all.

It seems more likely that Mrs. Langer is reading into states of affairs the forms she finds in language. This, of course, denies the process of symbolic transformation as it is set out in her theory. Rather than the mind creating the forms which are then implanted into language, the development of language generated the forms which are now an integral part of the mind's functioning. I do not mean to imply that the principle of symbolic transformation is inextricably bound to the picture theory. On the contrary, I think that a much sounder relationship between the symbolizing and the language-using activities of the mind could be given.

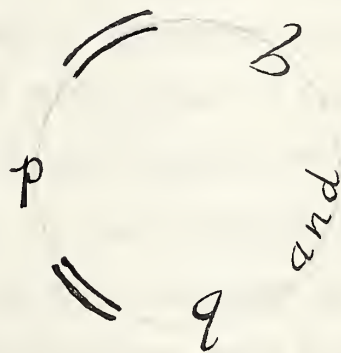
Supposing that Mrs. Langer's account of "picturing" had been thoroughly defended by her, how consistent is the principle when related to her position regarding symbols, conceptions, and objects? A paragraph from Paul Welsh deals concisely with this issue:

"Mrs. Langer, by making the sentence picture the fact abandons her theory of connotation. For she holds that the conception which a word symbolizes 'fits' the object the word denotes. Now we are told, a sentence 'means' a 'constellation of conceptions,' but it refers to fact

not by what it 'means,' but by what it pictures. The sentence, not the conceptions, now fits the fact; and we must now ask, how on her theory, the constellation of conceptions has any reference. Mrs. Langer so separates meaning and reference that knowing what a sentence 'means' has no bearing at all, can be of no aid in determining whether a sentence is true! But how we can know a sentence is true if we do not know its meaning she does not, and of course, cannot explain."³⁹

One other point needs consideration: Paul Welsh asks whether it is possible to argue from the discursiveness of language to the discursiveness of thought.⁴⁰ But he has put the question the wrong way around. Mrs. Langer contends that language follows upon discursive thinking: "It is in discursive thinking that truth and falsehood are born. Before terms are built into propositions, they assert nothing."⁴¹ And again, she defines discursive symbolism as "the vehicle of propositional thinking."⁴² This argument is analogous to Kant's proof that time and space are a priori concepts. She contends, with Cassirer, that when humans use language, it is immediately evident that the mind has previously symbolized its experience in such a way that language has become a useful tool of the mind. I think this point is well taken. However, it does not follow necessarily that, since words are written side by side in sentences like clothes hung on a line, our thoughts must take the same form. On the contrary, ideas seem to be complex unities, not freight trains with many countable box cars.

At this point Mrs. Langer's language theory runs counter to the theory of perception. She would like to hold to the Gestalt position in accounting for the apprehension of meaning, but in symbolizing the phenomenal world, the mind creates word-symbols, and she must explain how these find their way into complicated language constructs. These two positions are incompatible, however. Either the mind has ideas which are first of all unities, or it has particulars which are constructed into complex units. It cannot function both ways at once. If ideas are discursive --strung out like words in a sentence--and if only those ideas which can be expressed discursively are expressible, then the relational statement $p \equiv q$ must be of the linear form either circular or elliptical.



Read counterclockwise
beginning with "p".

The concept of self-identity must be inexpressible in linear form. It simply cannot be argued that ideas are discursive.

Language has a much wider function than Mrs. Langer wants to admit. She restricts discursive symbols to discursive thoughts, that is, to expressing firmly identifiable relations such as "Brutus killed Caesar." For her, language is restricted to so-called scientific communication--to reporting on the external world, and therefore a second mode of symbolism is necessary to express feelings. But this is too limited a view of language, as I have tried to demonstrate. Language has great expressive power through metaphor, for example. The statement, "I love you more than the sky above and the earth beneath" is an expression of emotion; it is also informative in the same way that "Brutus killed Caesar" is informative, and it contains a strong suggestion of persuasion as well. If Mrs. Langer defines language as being strictly informative, and all else as poetry, she is mistaken in her definition. I am not recommending a definition of language that would include any intelligibly related system of symbols, including the language of music, or the language of lover's glances. I agree with the view that language be verbal discourse, together with other systems such as mathematics which have grown out of the verbal form. Verbal language, with its relational syntax offers greater opportunities for richness, clarity and exactitude than any other form of symbolic activity. It is a mistake to undersell it.

PRESENTATIONAL SYMBOLS

The chapter "Discursive and Presentational Forms" in Philosophy in a New Key seems to court the logical positivists and then to defy them. Mrs. Langer follows the logicians and linguists to the end of their road, but refuses to admit that the road ends where they claim. Logical positivism contends that art is merely the expression of emotion and has no cognitive value. This is the point at which Mrs. Langer parts company with Russell, Carnap, and Wittgenstein. She says, concerning their attitude toward artistic expression, "I can see only a complete failure to apprehend a fundamental distinction."⁴³ The distinction to which she refers is between discursive thought and mythical conception. She is concerned to show that those aspects of experience which do not fit the "grammatical scheme of expression" may be accounted for. If they are not, then thought in a very restricted form must be regarded as our only intellectual activity. It may be that the examination of these experiences which are distinctly non-grammatical will reveal them to be inexpressible in symbolic forms. This is the investigation before us now. Mrs. Langer claims definitely that the "forms of feeling" are expressible, and that art, myth, ritual and religion are manifestations of these forms. The key to an understanding of non-discursive forms is the statement

that "our merest sense-experience is a process of formula-tion." There are obvious inferences here which hark through Cassirer back to Kant, and also to the Gestalt psychologists. Mrs. Langer's indebtedness in these directions is freely admitted in the many quotations made from various sources.⁴⁴

In order to clarify more thoroughly Mrs. Langer's conceptions of the presentational symbol, I will make a direct, uncritical comparison between it and its cognitive cousin, the discursive symbol. I will endeavor to clarify the conditions of its creation, its unique characteristics, and the conditions of its perception. The question of whether the presentational symbol may legitimately be called a symbol at all, will be dealt with following this exposition.

A. THE CREATION OF PRESENTATIONAL FORMS

Both the discursive and non-discursive modes of symbolism are said to spring from a common source in human consciousness, as has already been mentioned. Our minds perceive forms, though they receive merely a flux of impressions. This is inherent in our receptor apparatus. "The conditions for rationality lie deep in our pure animal experience--in our power of perceiving, in the elementary functions of our eyes and ears and fingers."⁴⁵ We assign words to many of the forms of our experience, but the forms

of feeling which, by their very character, are denied expression in language, are expressed in myth, ritual and art. As Mrs. Langer says, "...intelligence is a slippery customer; if one door is closed to it, it finds, or even breaks, another entrance to the world."⁴⁶ She insists, as has been suggested, that the mind is only able to understand that which it can symbolize and therefore "if one symbolism is inadequate, it seizes another." There is need at this point to distinguish between the mind's selecting and culling meaningful forms from experience, and the creation of symbols. The regular ticking of the clock is formed by the mind into meaningful rhythmic patterns, i.e.



Or, the same regular ticking may be grouped thus:



However, these patterns are not yet symbols. It is sufficient for now to point out that Mrs. Langer referred to all forms which spring from this ordering, selecting function of the mind--those which could not be expressed in words--as presentational forms.

It is important to notice at once that there is no apparent difference in the source of all symbols or forms which spring from the mind's ordering of experience. Just as the headwaters of two great river systems may originate in one glacier, so the two modes of symbolism are said to originate in the unique human power of perceiving and conceiving "things" rather than mere sense-data. Both modes may then be said to bear the stamp of mentality with equal justification; they are simply two different levels of abstraction, the non-discursive being the more primitive of the two.

B. DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

The quality of discursiveness which was referred to in the analogy of the clothes which must be hung side by side on a line, even though they were intended to be worn one on top of the other, does not apply to presentational forms. These forms are presented directly, and individually without anything intervening between the form of a feeling and its manifestation. Just how this is accomplished is not made thoroughly explicit. The presentational forms are called by this name because they are presented directly, rather than through some agent like a word-symbol. A symbol in art or ritual must be perceived in its entirety and then its meaning intuited immediately. The meaning of language, on the other hand, is perceived mediately through words whose impression on the perceiver can only be made discursively--like the clothes hung side by side. Remember, however, that the non-discursive forms are no less articulate, no less complex, no less significant. They may be referred to as symbols because they too point beyond themselves to meaning which it is their purpose to formalize, and clarify. The specification of those meanings which are made explicit by presentational symbols is a matter of major concern to be considered shortly.

The symbolic modes are said to run parallel to each other, i.e., language parallels myth, ritual and art. Just

as Wittgenstein claimed that propositions were pictures of the world, Langer says that a lyric poem or musical composition is a picture of feeling. Thus, the artistic process is a "noetic" process; not the feeling itself but the conception of it is what is communicated by the art object. Many difficult problems in the theory of art are skirted with this concept. The music is not sad, or gay, or jubilant; it expresses the composer's conception of his feeling of sadness, gaiety or jubilation.

Word-symbols possess much greater logical clarity than their non-discursive counterparts. They are adaptable to the needs of expressing general concepts, while the latter are not involved in making assertions, and cannot express anything of a general nature. Their expression is unique and individual. The significance of the presentational symbol is presented directly as one unified conception. Articulation is its life process; expressiveness is its purpose, not expression.⁴⁷

C. THE PERCEPTION OF A PRESENTATIONAL SYMBOL

The laws that govern the perception of visual forms such as lines, colors and proportions are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language. The most characteristic difference in Mrs. Langer's account is that the constituents of visual forms are not presented

successively, but simultaneously, as previously indicated. She says, "...the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision... Given all at once to the intelligent eye, an incredible wealth and detail of information is conveyed by the (presentational form, i.e., a portrait) where we do not have to stop to construe verbal meanings."⁴⁸ Since there are no words, or unit-symbols, a dictionary listing of meanings for lines, colors, melodies, shapes, balances, will never be possible. The meanings given through symbolic elements other than discursive language are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through "their relations within the total structure."

We turn now to an examination of the validity of a symbol whose very functioning "...depends on the fact that it is involved in a simultaneous, integral presentation."⁴⁹

D. IS THE PRESENTATIONAL SYMBOL A SYMBOL?

The presentational symbol functions very much like a private language, and it is in this sense I propose, at this point, to discuss it. The application of Mrs. Langer's theory to works of art will comprise the next main section of this study.

A word of explanation concerning the "private language" analogy. When an artist paints a picture, we are

led by Mrs. Langer to understand that this activity is both natural and necessary. His experience has been formed, his ideas have developed in ways which cannot be made explicit in words, and therefore he paints. The colors he chooses, the forms of the picture, the lines and figures and all the relations between light and darkness, are analogous to the forms of feelings which they represent. Now, imagine that these forms were made manifest not as a picture, but as a paragraph spoken in a private language in which none of the words are familiar. It will, of course, be impossible to understand this language discursively. Whatever it is that is made manifest must be conceived by the listener as a unity, as one individual, articulate, meaningful expression.* Somehow, as we hear the artist express himself in this private fashion, we recognize something vaguely familiar. He seems to be referring to experiences which we have had, though we cannot say when or where. Like Helen Keller, we feel "a misty consciousness as of something forgotten--a thrill of returning thought." Let us assume that this is our reaction to the private expression of an artist's private

* "Expression" in this sense need not be thought to involve the communication of meaning from one person to another. The artist need have no audience in mind. He may work merely to make his own ideas explicit--to give his feelings permanent symbolic form.

feelings. The question is, in what sense may this spoken paragraph of private language be called a "presentational symbol?"

It is undoubtedly true that all sense experience involves some selecting and organizing activity on behalf of the human apparatus, and thus involves the apprehension of sensory forms. In the case of the discursive symbol it is not difficult to point to the subject, the symbol, the conception* and the object, but with presentational symbols the problem is not so easy, if at all possible. For example, to what, exactly, does the symbol refer? What is it that is symbolized? A brief answer would be that in the paragraph of private language the sound expresses an idea of a feeling. It is this idea to which the symbol refers. The artist's spoken words do not serve as a symptom, nor as the expression of feelings, but rather as the composer's knowledge of the emotional, and mental tensions of life. Thus his emission is primarily an exposition of human feelings. This is what is meant by calling the process of creation which produces such symbols a "noetic" process--an important refinement of the nineteenth century expressive theory which held that art was a

* When a name is spoken, it evokes the conception of a certain man so called, and prepares the mind for further conceptions in which the notion of that man is involved. See Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, p. 50.

symptomatic expression of some aspect of reality. Regardless of this improvement, we are still perplexed. If all symbol functions involve a four term relationship, how may each of the terms be related to the private language in question? The "subject" is the interpreter, the symbol is the spoken paragraph, the conception is the thought evoked by the symbol, and the object is the "forms of feeling." The symbol, then, is said to stand for the forms of feeling. More accurately, the symbol denotes the forms of feeling, or at least it should, if it is a legitimate symbol. Mrs. Langer qualifies this reference by saying that, "denotation is...the complex relationship which a name has to an object which bears it; but...the connotation of a word is the conception it conveys."⁵⁰ Presentational symbols share this more intimate relationship of connotation with the conceptions they represent. To say that a symbol connotes a form of feeling, is certainly an unusual assignment of connotation.

Professor J. E. Creighton outlined his study of the character of feeling and the development of mind in an article entitled "Reason and Feeling."⁵¹ His conclusion was that "feeling does not remain a static element, constant in form and content, but is transformed and disciplined through its interplay with other aspects of experience...

Indeed the character of the feeling in any experience may be taken as an index of the mind's grasp of its object." (italics mine) The "object" to which a presentational symbol refers remains a mystery because we are forced to ask Professor Creighton to identify the object which the mind grasps. His answer may be given in a quotation from the same article: "Feelings have definite forms, which become progressively articulated." It is these articulated feelings which become the objects to the mind. No explanation is given, however, of how the mind perceives an articulated feeling, and how it (the mind) functions in conjunction with the body to produce the articulate symbol analogous to the form of feeling. It certainly does not do this in the way it perceives a tree and then conceives the symbol "tree." We are told that the mind functions at a much more primitive level in creating presentational forms than it does in creating and learning language.

This distinction may be clarified by considering two different expressions of "love." Using discursive language a young man says with deep feeling, "I love you." Finding this entirely inadequate, he may "paint" the form of his feeling in a paragraph of private language. The latter expression may have little meaning for unsympathetic listeners, but it may communicate remarkably well to the object of his affection. The difference between these two

expressions points up the crepuscular nature of the reference of the presentational symbol. The word "love" refers to a general class of activities, behaviors, experiences, attitudes of a well known but ill-defined variety. The presentational symbol, on the other hand, can make no such general reference. It is an individual symbol according to Mrs. Langer, referring to the speaker's conception of a unique feeling at a particular time. The form of feeling is presented directly in the private language, and as we come to understand the artist's spoken words, it will recreate in us the form of this paragraph which is isomorphic with the artist's original feeling. The psychological basis for this claim is yet to be established, but assuming that an analogy holds between the forms of feeling and the presentational forms of art, myth and ritual, as a symbol, the presentational is a very unusual one. It is denied the possibility of being a general term, and as a particular, its referent is so private that it is unidentifiable.

Consider another aspect of this problem. In ordinary language useage, we consult a dictionary for the "meaning" of words with which we are unfamiliar, or a speaker is requested to explain the particular use he may be making of certain words. Symbols in language are learnable. A symbol whose meaning is clear to us, becomes a part of our

vocabulary; we can communicate our ideas using the words in our vocabulary. The meaning of presentational forms may become clear to us as well, and we may figuratively speaking, have a vocabulary (repertoire) of these private language paragraphs. Mrs. Langer's point may be granted that the feeling which we experience is analogous in form to that of the artist's feeling, though I can see no possible way in which this claim could be validated. Notice, however, that as symbols, these known and catalogued expressions would remain useless in assisting our own expression. Their language is not only private, their reference and meaning is private as well. It would be sheer mockery for one to try to employ the elements of another's expression in his own. No two experiences are identical, and therefore no two feelings could bear the same form. This would account for changing styles of expression, but it does not explain the conscious use made of certain specific elements in many presentational forms. Non-discursive symbols are not available for re-use, nor can their meanings be translated into other terms. Mrs. Langer recognizes these difficulties while still insisting that presentational forms function as symbols.

It is perhaps inaccurate to declare the presentational symbol entirely useless once its meaning is conceived. To the interpreter it may be stored in the memory as a

reminder of the great difficulty we had in interpreting its import. Beyond this, it can serve only as a museum piece. The artist's forms of feeling have achieved permanent embodiment in the symbol, and they may be investigated anew, or reviewed at our leisure. Notice, however, that each time an investigation is made it is to the symbol that we return. Rather than the symbol serving to lead us to a consideration of the consistency of the artist's feelings, to the maturity of their formulation, to the applicability of his ideas to problems of his day, rather than this, the symbol leads us to itself. A symbol should, by definition, stand for something; it should refer the mind by way of association, beyond itself. It should be a means to an end. But the presentational symbol is an end in itself. The artist's need for expression is complete in the paragraph of private language. His past feelings are now formalized there, his mind moves on to the selection of other sense experiences which will become clear to him when they are made explicit in other ways--in other tones, "words," inflections. As interpreters we too look only to the presentational symbol and not beyond it to something for which it stands. We need not look beyond it because it is a "significant form." Thus we have the contradictory situation of a form which is an end in itself, serving as a symbol which is supposed to carry the mind beyond itself.

Mrs. Langer is not unaware of the magnitude of some of these problems. But even if we agree with her that language is an inadequate instrument for the expression of feelings, I must admit to having grave doubts that the presentational forms she speaks of can function as symbols, or that the definition of "symbol" can be justifiably misconstrued to include presentational forms. If the case cannot be made plausible in our "private language" analogy, it seems doubtful that greater rigor will be forthcoming when works of art are said to be symbols. However, Mrs. Langer claims that there is "a kind of symbolism peculiarly adapted to the explication of 'unspeakable' things, though it lacks the cardinal virtue of language, which is denotation. The most highly developed type of such purely connotational semantic is music."⁵² Perhaps our "private language" was inadequate as a "purely connotational semantic"; the full import of presentational forms, and the clarity with which they function may be found in an examination of the work of art.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORK OF ART AS A SYMBOL

Renewed interest in symbolism in the twentieth century has returned men's minds to certain values not found in the cultural climate of the nineteenth century. The last chapter of Philosophy in a New Key entitled "The Fabric of Meaning" is concerned with the apparent fact that "few people today are born to an environment which gives them spiritual support."¹ The reasons lie to a great extent in our disregard for historic values. John Morley has suggested that the devaluation of symbols in the eighteenth century was part of a general shift in the intellectual climate in which men turned away their interest in "matters of value to matters of fact."² The result has been a tremendous technical advance at the expense of one half of man's personality. Mrs. Langer feels that the "loss of old universal symbols endangers our safe unconscious orientation. The new forms of our new order have not yet acquired that rich, confused, historic accretion of meanings that makes many familiar things 'charged' symbols to which we seem to respond instinctively."³

I mention this aspect of Mrs. Langer's argument to clarify the attitude she has--shared by others as well--that the whole personality of man should be involved intimately in the creation of forms which are symbolic not only of thought, but also of human feelings. This would include presentational as well as discursive forms. Too many of us

wander about with a portable radio in hand, never thinking that we might sing a song ourselves. We rely almost entirely on the television set, on professional artists and sportsmen, on machines and gadgets to entertain us, while in contrast, a seventeenth century London burgher such as Samuel Pepys selected his household servants on the basis of their having a good singing voice to contribute to the family after dinner madrigal session. Mrs. Langer feels that her argument has implications far beyond an academic theory of art. Since the well being of any one is dependent on an adequate formulation and expression of inner feelings, we must learn to express ourselves both in language and art either as creators or performers, or as sensitive "beholders." And Mrs. Langer does have a point!

Art and language both represent formative aspects of the human organism, this much can definitely be granted. Language has developed and been refined mainly out of the necessity to cope with the external conditions of life, to control things about us for our preservation and comfort. Art, on the other hand, stands for the inner and subjective side of man; it seems to have grown out of the need to externalize the inner states, to give permanent form to the emotions, and insights into the values of life. Lewis Mumford expresses this view of art thus:

"Sympathy and empathy are the characteristic ways of art: a feeling with, a feeling into, the innermost experiences of other men. The work of art is the visible, potable spring from which men share the deep underground sources of their experience. Art arises out of man's need to create for himself, beyond any requirement for mere animal survival, a meaningful and valuable world: his need to dwell on, to intensify, and to project in more permanent forms those precious parts of his experience that would otherwise slip too quickly out of his grasp, or sink too deeply into his unconscious to be retrieved."⁴

This statement could have been a direct quotation from Mrs. Langer. It indicates the extensive modern interest in semantics and symbols. In the 1953 second edition of Gilbert and Kuhn's A History of Aesthetics a chapter added to the 1939 edition contains thirty-five pages dealing almost exclusively with this contemporary change of outlook.

The intimacy of relation between the symbol and its emotive meaning evident in this statement from Mumford, and indeed in all of Langer, suggests an expressive theory of art. Allusions to Mrs. Langer's espousal of the expressive theory have been made. Since any thorough description of the function of a symbol involves an account of "expression," perhaps it would be well to outline Mrs. Langer's interpretation of the expressive theory.

ART AS EXPRESSION

There is no argument as far as Mrs. Langer is concerned, over the fact that art is somehow expressive. She says, that "people of artistic discernment...know that feeling does inhere somehow in every imaginal form."⁵ To deny this is merely to demonstrate one's own artistic ignorance. What dependence does art have on being expressive? Is the expressive quality more than an incidental one? The answer: " 'Expression' in the logical sense--presentation of an idea through an articulate symbol--is the ruling power and purpose of art."⁶ The process by which she has arrived at the conclusion that "expressiveness in one definite and appropriate sense, is the same in all art works of any kind," is a deductive process which claims to have eliminated all differences among the various arts. The principles remaining, those that obtain wholly and fundamentally in every kind of art, are few, but decisive, she says. They are the principles that determine what is art and what is not. The thing that is created is not the same in any two art forms, but the principle of creation is the same. And "living form" means the same in all of them. Thus, Mrs. Langer declares: "A work of art is an expressive form created for our perception through sense or imagination, and what it expresses is human feeling."⁷ Let us turn to language and see in what ways it is expressive.

The most highly developed symbolic device humanity has evolved is language. Mrs. Langer's view of it has been delineated. By means of language we can conceive both the intangible, incorporeal things we call our ideas, and the elements of our perceptual world that we call facts. It is through language that facts are related when we think, remember and imagine. And above all, we can communicate our ideas, and talk about facts by using the symbols of language. This use of language we call discourse, and as we have seen, Mrs. Langer calls the pattern of discourse discursive form. It is an amazingly powerful pattern, but it is nevertheless limited to expressing only those conceptions that can be put into discursive form.*

The symbol, then, is an expressive agent, an expressive form. By means of a word, ideas are communicated or expressed. This is the road down which Mrs. Langer and the Logical Positivists walk arm in arm. But they part company when she says, "Yet, there is a great deal of experience that is knowable...yet defies...verbal expression."⁸ The argument of course, is that symbols of other kinds (non-discursive, presentational) can express just as meaningfully the subjective aspects of experience. The

* (In the first part of this study I argued against this point. For the purposes of the present argument we might accept Mrs. Langer's point of view.

relation between presentational symbols, expression, and meaning is just as tight and vigorous a relation as that between words and their mode of expressing. The doctrine of symbolic transformation provides the propaedeutic for the "necessary" union between expression and symbols, in Mrs. Langer's theory. No expression is possible without symbols, and since works of art are symbols, they are expressive. Thus, expression properly understood is the same as symbolic function. Remember, that the doctrine concerns "logical expression," that emotion is logically expressed when symbols are devised in the mind through which the emotion can be conceived, and the conception of the emotion is complete when the form of the emotion becomes apparent, and can be contemplated objectively. The symbol created as the objective form must have a form similar to that of the emotion or idea of the emotion, otherwise, Mrs. Langer claims, the feeling is not conceived, understood, or expressed. The isomorphic relationship of the emotive form and the symbol is absolutely essential to her theory for only in this way is the emotion logically expressed. This point has been made before. I reiterate it merely to indicate the "expressive pillar" upon which Mrs. Langer's theory rests. Every work of art, the argument goes, has a pattern of tensions and resolutions similar to that of immediate feeling. It has a form--an expressive

form. Let us consider for a moment what is meant by form in this context.

A. EXPRESSIVE FORM

The word "form" has many meanings. Works of art are said to have forms, or characteristic structures such as sonata form, variation form, passacaglia and fugue form in music. Similar examples of "form" may be found in poetry and dance particularly. But this is a narrow useage. On my shelf is a book entitled The Changing Forms of Art, and in it Patrick Heron shows no concern whatever for the development of sonata form or any other such limited concept in other art media. He has in mind a broader concept concerned with a quality or function thought to be common to all the arts. "Logical form"--the broader variety--is involved in the notion of expression, at least in the kind of expression that is said to characterize art. But a logical form common to two perceptible forms is not always easily detected. It may become apparent only after we have learned the principle by which the two perceptible forms from which it is abstracted are related. In Feeling and Form Mrs. Langer endeavors to point out the principles which relate various art forms, in order that we might learn to distinguish the logical form in works of art. Viewing a work of art, in her account of logical form, is like seeing the bed of a dried up river. It may be a chasm

cut deep into solid rock. The bed of the river in this case was shaped by the flow of the river; the convolutions, hollows and lines in the stone are a permanent record of the river's currents that have now ceased to exist. The shape is static, but we might say that it expresses the dynamic flow of the river. In this case we must know that it was the currents of the river, and not some other factor that caused the shaping of the stone. But given this fact, we have two congruent forms: 1) the form of the river's flow, and 2) the form of the rock (like a cast and its mould). And the "logical form" or congruence between the two is in this case a relationship between a dynamic form and a static one. The same is true in art in which an "expressive form" (logical form) is said to express the forms of feeling. The logical form should not be thought of as another separate form or thing; it is merely an abstract concept, a semblance. An expressive form, then, "is any perceptible or imaginable whole that exhibits relations of parts, or points or even qualities or aspects within the whole, so that it may be taken to represent some other whole whose elements have analogous relations."⁹ Language, we are told, is such a form. A proposition is analogous in form to the facts of the world. Works of art are expressive forms and they may be taken as representing the forms of feeling because the two have analogous relations,

they are related like the river bed and the currents which carved the stone. It will be immediately obvious why Mrs. Langer maintained the "picture theory" of meaning in spite of its implausibility. The parallel reference between words and works of art and the "facts" they express is extremely useful to this theory of symbolic expression in art. The criticisms of the "picture theory" are therefore general criticisms of Mrs. Langer's entire thesis.

B. SELF-EXPRESSION AND LOGICAL EXPRESSION

In fairness to the account given of expressiveness in art, we should notice the distinction drawn between the self-expression of emotion, and logical expression, or the formulation and representation of emotion as a "logical picture of sentient life." Those who feel that only discourse is a legitimate symbolic form claim that the life of feeling is formless and chaotic, capable only of symptomatic expression. Mrs. Langer calls the cry of pain and similar exclamations "self-expression." But, such actions have nothing to do with aesthetic creation. "Sheer self-expression requires no artistic form. A lynching-party howling round the gallows-tree, a woman wringing her hands over a sick child...is giving vent to intense feelings; but such scenes are not occasions for music, least of all for composing."¹⁰ She argues, then, that artists do not endeavor to give vent to their own

feelings. There is no effort on their part to establish a relation of sympathy with an audience which will then experience the same emotional experience. Mrs. Langer's account allows an artist to express feelings he may never have actually experienced himself. This view is a departure from Croce, Beethoven and Liszt, but at least one great artist is in agreement. Wagner claims that music "does not express the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an individual...but passion, love or longing itself."¹¹ What we experience in beholding works of art is the comprehension of the artist's feelings, "without pretending to have them or imputing them to anyone else."¹² Thus, the expression of feeling--the function that makes the work an expressive form--is not symptomatic at all. We do not want self-expression in the concert hall. An artist, then, expresses feeling, but not in the way an African tribesman shouts his wild song. The elusive feelings of life that are usually considered inexpressible are formed by the artist, into objective forms or semblances. The art objects or gestures, or sounds thus created are symbols--expressive forms--which communicate the conception of "inward reality."

This is Mrs. Langer's account of expression in art. The traditional theory of direct emotional expression, the kind discussed by Hunter Mead in Aesthetics, and the same kind criticized so tersely by Professor O. K. Bouwsma in

Elton's Aesthetics and Language, this traditional theory is improved in three important respects by Mrs. Langer.

1) The distinction between logical expression and self-expression avoids the problem of distinguishing a work of art from a cry of pain and all the other implications which follow. 2) The notion of semblance provides a thorough-going theory relating all the arts, and therefore gives credence to the claim that expressiveness may relate to works of art of any kind. 3) The claim that works of art have a symbolic function very much like word-symbols sets the well known expressiveness of language arguing for the expressiveness of presentational symbols. This claim more than any other forces serious aestheticians to re-examine the expressive theory of art.

Most of the criticisms that might be made here are bound so closely to the very core issues in Mrs. Langer's theory, that I propose to delay them until later. The problem of the legitimacy of presentational symbols, for example, is intimately involved in the notion of expressiveness. If the work of art is not a legitimate symbol, if it does not actually refer to something, then it cannot be said to express in the way ordinary symbols express. Criticisms of this nature will be held over. One point, however, needs to be considered here, and that concerns self-expression and the emotions that are said to attend it.

If self-expression were actually to have the attributes that Mrs. Langer ascribes to it, and were to be as different from logical expression as she claims, then the notion that emotion in art is perceived only through symbols could hardly be contested. But it seems to me that the emotions which are "self-expressed" like the ki-yi-yi of an Indian dancer, can be contemplated in themselves, and need not be acted on in the way the dance is acting on them. An actual emotion, not merely the memory of it, can be contemplated, and can even be preserved in the form in which it is contemplated without ever being expressed. I believe that Mrs. Langer's account of symbolic function is intended to be a universal theory, and therefore to be a full account, and the only account that can be given of the way emotions are conceived; they are conceptualized, symbolized and thereby expressed, she says. I maintain that an emotion can be attended to directly, without it having to be symbolized. This might happen most easily in the mind of the artist. It seems to me that Mrs. Langer is committed to the contrary view--that emotions which receive self-expression are always acted upon overtly, and those which are expressed "logically" become symbolized necessarily in objective form. I do not believe this strict dichotomy can be maintained.

C. METAPHOR

One wonders, after reading the two or three pages in Philosophy in a New Key devoted to considering the vital principle of language we call metaphor, why Mrs. Langer insisted on maintaining such an independent existence for both language and art. From comments she makes, it would seem feasible to relate the two, and to pose metaphorical expression as the intermediate position between them. An examination of her comments on metaphor is quite revealing.

In metaphor, the literal meaning of a word becomes a symbol to describe whatever it can appropriately describe. We say that a fire flares up, and we intend to account for the action of the flame. When we say that a person's anger flares up, we know there is no flame involved. We account for the "action" of anger metaphorically. Thus, the concept of a flame flaring up, symbolizes the feeling of mounting anger, which is inexpressible except through some such metaphor. Another example from Mrs. Langer will bear out her idea of symbolic reference in this context.

"In a genuine metaphor, an image of the literal meaning is our symbol for the figurative meaning, the thing that has no name of its own. If we say that a brook is laughing in the sunlight, an idea of laughter intervenes to symbolize the spontaneous, vivid activity of the brook."¹³

There is nothing unusual here. This use of language is commonplace. The interesting point is that in Mrs. Langer's

account metaphorical references are presentational symbols.

"Where a precise word is lacking to designate the novelty which the speaker would point out, he resorts to the powers of logical analogy, and uses a word denoting something else that is a presentational symbol for the thing he means; the context makes it clear that he cannot mean the thing literally denoted, and must mean something else symbolically."¹⁴

After what has been said about presentational symbols, this is an unusual useage. The discursive way in which metaphor is presented to the mind is unlike the claims made for presentational symbols. I do not think it can be argued that metaphor is comprehended non-discursively. For instance, the line "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons,"¹⁵ conveys metaphorical meaning in units smaller than the whole line. A meaningful reference is made with "I have measured out my life." In this regard metaphor functions differently than Mrs. Langer's presentational symbols. Nor can it be maintained that metaphor does not make assertions--that their purpose is expressiveness, not expression. The statement "The king's anger flared up," is assertive. It expresses a fact about the king's feelings. These are significant differences. Why is Mrs. Langer so eager to argue for a strict line of demarkation between two different modes of symbolism? The answer is that any hint that language might be extended in range to include the expression of feelings, would destroy the need of a second symbolic mode, and

therefore metaphor must be classed with presentational symbols in her theory.

In a lecture included in Problems of Art Mrs. Langer recognizes the power of metaphor again.

"Even in the use of language, if we want to name something that is too new to have a name...we resort to metaphor...The principle of metaphor is simply the principle of saying one thing and meaning another, and expecting to be understood to mean the other. A metaphor is not language, it is an idea expressed by language, an idea that in its turn functions as a symbol to express something."¹⁶

It is difficult to see why metaphor is not language. It was pointed out in the first chapter¹⁷ that words do not refer to one thing only, that one word "tiger" might bring to mind a number of different conceptions. It is surely a spurious procedure to exclude from "language" any reference involving the word "tiger" other than references to the animal called by this name. Note these sentences for example: "The wind has the bite of a tiger." "John is a tiger when he is stalking wild game."

A continuum is evident in language, ranging from the direct reference of word-symbols, to the very indirect reference of some poetry. Metaphor is the device that connects the two extremes into a continuous range of more or less literal meaning.

The notion of semblance arose in connection with the account of expressiveness in art. "Semblance" is a key concept in Mrs. Langer's theory--another of the effective refinements incorporated into her symbolic theory of aesthetics.

SEMBLANCE

The theory of semblance involves the immediate character of the work of art.

Consider the question "What is created in a work of art?" It is very difficult to think of a tidy, definitive answer because the nature of art is somehow strange and elusive. It has a transparency, an autonomy or self-sufficiency which defies description. "This detachment from actuality, the 'otherness' that gives even a bona fide product like a building or a vase some aura of illusion, is a crucial factor, indicative of the very nature of art."¹⁸ Mrs. Langer avoids using the very obvious word "image" though an image is a "purely virtual object." Its association is so strongly visual that the word is inadequate to apply to all art objects for that reason. She turns to Jung's analysis of the unified illusion in dreams which he calls "semblance." For Mrs. Langer, the aesthetic object is a semblance or virtual object. It is important to distinguish between the art object, i.e. the sounds emitted by the violin, or the paint on the canvas, and the aesthetic object, i.e. that which is attended to, the conception of the art object. The true power of semblance "lies in the fact that it is an abstraction, a symbol, the bearer of an idea."¹⁹

Semblance is very much like Croce's notion of intuition. "I will say at once," (in answer to the question, what is art)

"in the simplest manner, that art is vision or intuition. The artist produces an image or a phantasm; and he who enjoys art turns his gaze upon the point which the artist has indicated, looks through the chink which he has opened and reproduces that image in himself."²⁰ Mrs. Langer's account of semblance is able to avoid many of the problems which grow out of Croce's "intuition." A correlation of the two positions will follow shortly.

The first and most obvious attribute of semblance is the tendency we have referred to, the tendency of the aesthetic object to seem to be "dissociated from its mundane environment."²¹ It has an "air of illusion, of being a sheer image."²² When a building is presented to us as a "sheer visual form," we abstract it from the physical, practical aspects of ordinary perception and it becomes a "virtual" object, having no being apart from its immediate appearance.²³ We are cautioned against assuming this to be a dream world in which we might escape from ordinary reality. The virtual object is not in a different order of reality; it is an abstraction from the causal order, but remains in present reality; it is "given us to look at, not to live in."²⁴ There is no hint that semblance filters off the idea of substance, leaving a group of related qualities which are associated only by the mind, in the mind. Semblance maintains the formal or so-called "ordering virtues" of substance, but it drops any notion of representation. How would it be

best to explain this? Perhaps an example from the visual arts would help.

In painting, the primary illusion or basic abstraction is "virtual space."²⁵ This is not the a priori concept of Kant's Critique; it is not the space of common experience or of science which is supposedly purely abstract, nor is it known through the perception of far and near sounds, or through the touching of extended objects. Virtual space is purely visual; it is self-contained and independent. Because the eye alone perceives virtual space, the artist must produce something more than a direct copy. He must provide "visual substitutes" for the extra aids we receive in practical life through other senses. Thus, virtual space is created by the artist. It is said to emerge "at the first stroke of brush or pencil that concentrates the mind entirely on the picture plane and neutralizes the actual limits of vision."²⁶ The main responsibility of a painter in creating a work of visual art is to shape the virtual space and "carve," as it were, perceptual forms out of it. The power to accomplish this lies in his imagination, for we are told, "everything actual must be transformed by imagination into something purely experiential."²⁷ Simultaneous with the creation of virtual space is the creation of a virtual form, the significant form that, according to Mrs. Langer, is symbolic of the forms of feeling. The entire creation including space and form is a virtual object--a semblance. Notice how cleverly this theory skirts the problem of representation.

Objects of common experience may appear in a painting, but their individual identity is unimportant. To recognize an apple in a Cezanne still-life counts neither for nor against Cezanne, or his painting. It merely exhibits a non-aesthetic approach to the work by the perceiver, if this is the thing (the apple) that is valued.

The power of Mrs. Langer's theory is evident. The concept of semblance borrows some of the strongest points from the formalist theory. The perceiver must maintain a certain "psychical distance," the aesthetic object is a synthesis of forms, and these forms are significant. Neither Clive Bell, or Roger Fry, nor Patrick Heron will take the next step with Mrs. Langer, however, and say that the formal qualities of a work have import because of their isomorphic relation to the forms of feeling.

A. ABSTRACTION IN SEMBLANCE

Arthur Berndtson has explored quite carefully the nature and extent of the abstraction or separation from reality that is involved in the concept of semblance.²⁸ His account clarifies an important point regarding this theory. There are, he says, three possible explanations for the abstraction which occurs in semblance: either it is a separation from reality, or from essence, or from the perceiving mind, from the self which apprehends the semblance.

That the work of art preserves the formal or ordering virtues of substance, and therefore maintains identity in reality, has already been stressed. It is similarly removed from the causal order, though only externally. "Externally, the semblance does not have the causal relations to physical nature that are sustained by the physical basis of the work of art, and that would be sustained by objects represented in the semblance if those objects had an existence in nature. But the semblance does have causal connections with human sensibility, which are the basis of the value of the work of art."²⁹ The theory of semblance is set up in such a way as to avoid scientific classification. This, according to Mrs. Langer, is an essential aspect of its nature. But "motion, and force, and vital pulsation" are not eliminated. They and their "dynamic affiliates of causality," can enter into semblance, and do so in its internal structure. And since these causal factors are present in semblance, they carry a strong "charge of reality." The vital pulsations spoken of are so closely related to the emotions and feelings that semblance is particularly adapted to the role of conveying or expressing feelings. Berndtson believes that the dissociation from reality in semblance contributes to, rather than detracts from, a heightened sense of reality because, to experience a semblance seems like a more universal thing than an ordinary experience.

The possibility of semblance being abstracted as an essence from an essence is obscured in Mrs. Langer's account because the scope of semblance ranges so widely from simple units (sheer visual forms) to very complex ones such as intricately structured decorations involving many symbols. The concept of semblance must have the flexibility to be able to cope with the wide range of art objects or forms, and therefore, no adequate account of "essence" can be given. In a way, this is a sign of weakness, because "the idea of semblance suggests a clarity and concreteness of presentation reminiscent of image."³⁰ And yet, the diversity of art forms demands a broad reference--broader than the idea of semblance seems to allow.

Mrs. Langer's own view is more consistent with Berndtson's third kind of abstraction: "Semblance from the practical order, which is an order of desires and needs stemming from an individual organism or self and leading to actions which preserve and extend the conative being of that individual."³¹ Mrs. Langer agrees that the basic separation of semblance is a separation from "material existence." In the chapter on "Semblance" she says,

"All forms in art, then, are abstracted forms; their content is only a semblance, a pure appearance, whose function is to make them, too, apparent--more freely and wholly apparent than they could be if they were exemplified in a context of real circumstance and anxious interest.

It is in this elementary sense that all art is abstract. Its very substance, quality without practical significance, is an abstraction from material existence."³²

And this kind of separation enlarges the self, rather than diminishes it, because there is not an elimination of reality but merely a shift in regard to it. We must assume a state of mind wherein objects of art are contemplated for their own sakes. It may seem strange that Mrs. Langer makes no special mention of the "aesthetic attitude," a subject which rarely escapes consideration in books on aesthetics. The fact is, her doctrine of semblance includes the topic of aesthetic attitude and does justice to it without making direct reference to it.

B. ILLUSION

The concept of semblance allows us to interpret the created art symbol as an illusion, as a purely "virtual" object. Any real object appears in different ways to different people, Mrs. Langer says, and these appearances are semblances of the object. But sometimes, as in the case of a shadow, there is no real object, but only a collection of appearances. This we call an illusion. And it is in this sense that a work of art is an illusion. When we see an apple in a painting we know that if we reached for it we would feel paint on canvas rather than a round, firm, smooth apple. The primary concern of the artist is to

"sustain the illusion and to articulate its own forms to where it coincides with the forms of feeling. It is this coincidence, in which the symbol-illusion objectifies our subjective experiences, that relates art to actuality."³³

Feeling and Form contains lengthy treatments of each of the major art forms, and in each instance Mrs. Langer's aim is to reduce the arts to their "primary illusion." This illusion "swallows up" all appearances, all visual, tactile, kinaesthetic elements into one unified whole--a semblance. It is this semblance that is said to be unique, untranslatable, unanalyzable.

Whether the theory of semblance, and particularly this latter conclusion resulting from it, can be defended, I very much doubt. Nevertheless, Mrs. Langer's account of semblance helps her to avoid some of Croce's most thorny problems. To the charge that "intuitionism" projects the art object entirely into the mind, making it private, esoteric, and unreal, she may reply: Works of art are in the mind, but they are not only there. Mental conceptions of art correspond to the objective material object. "Although a work of art may abstract from the temporal character of experience, what it renders in its own logical projection must be true in design to the structure of experience."³⁴ It has already been mentioned that a work of art contains some causal content; this, combined with

the special content called "import" provides a secure impression of objective reality. Artistic forms, she says, "are logically expressive, or significant, forms...The form is immediately given to perception, and yet it reaches beyond itself; it is a semblance, but seems to be charged with reality. Like speech that is physically nothing but little buzzing sounds, it is filled with its meaning, and its meaning is a reality."³⁵ This statement emphasizes the fact that the work of art is a symbol and therefore is imbued with meaningful content which is available to anyone who will put forth the effort to conceive its meaning. It must be remembered that it is not actual feelings that art expresses. Mrs. Langer's theory is a noetic one because art expresses ideas of feeling, instead of actual feelings, as we have seen.

A second major problem for Croce concerned the charge that the art object is merely a public, permanent record of a past intuitive event. And again Mrs. Langer has an answer: The formulation of a semblance through an abstracting and fusing process in the mind produces a "something" (symbol) which is parallel in form to the forms of feeling. As a symbol, the work of art is always ready to refer to the artist's conception which did admittedly take place at an earlier time. But notice that Croce's is merely an incomplete account. The art object may be static,

but from this a dynamic aesthetic object (semblance) can be perceived.

Semblance, then, as Mrs. Langer has defined it, is an extremely useful concept. It combines into one "fused" experience, "the factors of concretely luminous essence and of objective contemplation."³⁶ The difficulties of relating the objective work of art to the inner state which it seems to be necessarily related to are given fuller treatment here than in any other account, I believe. Osborne's Theory of Beauty claims that the artist creates "organic wholes for contemplation"³⁷ and thus accounts for the assembled--yet unified--art object. However, his theory lacks the symbolic reference which relates the art form to the subjective state from which it springs.

There are problems in Mrs. Langer's account, particularly concerning the "virtual" categories, but at least she has wrestled with the main issues. The only area on which I wish there were more detail concerns the problem of the analogy that is said to exist between the form of the symbol and the forms of feeling. If the picture theory of meaning is supposed to provide illumination of this relationship, I find it inadequate.

C. THEORY OF SEMBLANCE RECOMMENDED

The particular points which recommend the theory of semblance are these:³⁸

1) The idea that the imagination is a special agent of aesthetic experience has wide popularity. Semblance incorporates this idea because it is only through the imagination that the elements of a work of art are assembled, fused, and transformed into a semblance. The role of imagination in connection with semblance appears quite late in Feeling and Form (chapter XV), but it is obvious that the concept of semblance is absolutely dependent on the transforming power of the imagination. The statement that makes this clear was quoted above.

2) The uniqueness of art is given adequate emphasis by the theory of semblance. A work of art cannot be confused with practical realities, for reasons that have been mentioned, nor can it be reduced to the abstract concepts of science or philosophy; and it is not the tool of social reform, though moral ideas may find their way into the structure of the semblance.

3) The idea of creation has specific and understandable meaning within the theory of semblance. The distinction between the creation of an artifact and a work of art makes this clear. Something special, unique and meaningful emerges from the assembly of the elements in a work of art that is much more than the mere sum of the parts. This extra something is the semblance.

4) The book Feeling and Form is a literal manifestation of a further advantage of the idea of semblance. This book makes a very strong claim to have found a basis for the unity of the arts, and that basis lies in the idea of semblance, and in the notion of symbolic function. The apparent differences between the arts are said to be transcended by the idea of semblance, because it can apply equally well to all the arts. Feeling and Form is a demonstration of the claim that semblance can apply to all the arts, a demonstration similar to Bach's forty-eight Preludes and Fugues which are literal proof of the value of the principle of tempered tuning. The painter's imagination fuses the materials of his art into virtual space, the poet transforms words into virtual memory, the composer transforms sounds into virtual time, and so forth. Whether we agree with the theory of semblance or not, the breadth of its reference, and the thoroughness of its conception must be recognized.

D. CRITICISMS OF SEMBLANCE

Now, how valid is this theory? How accurately does it account for artistic creation and perception? Mrs. Langer has no intention of slipping any half-conceived theory under the wire. She welcomes a thorough assessment because her's is supposed to be a true general theory, and such a theory has "no exceptions, and when it seems to have them it is not properly stated."³⁹ This claim is too ambitious

for the idea of semblance, I feel, because the strict formula upon which each "virtual" power is founded, is too narrow. Art is more diverse than Mrs. Langer's theory allows.

The primary illusion of drama, for example, is supposed to be found in a strong sense of destiny. "As literature creates a virtual past, drama creates a virtual future. The literary mode is the mode of Memory; the dramatic mode is the mode of Destiny."⁴⁰ This distinction will only hold if the dramatic illusion is thought of as a performance, and not as a reading. It seems to me that a novel or a dramatic work could present the same virtual time, either past or future. The characteristics are not as clearly marked as is claimed. And then, why is the dramatic illusion spoken of as "history coming?" It might be argued that drama presents the present, and that the future is implied in the development of the plot. But how does this differ from some present-tense novels, and how does it differ from ordinary experience in which the future is always implied? A person plants a small sapling expecting shade in the future, but any number of things may frustrate this expectation; the same is true in drama, and therefore the "virtual future" illusion is misconceived.

Or again, it has been adequately demonstrated, I think, by many contemporary painters that the tactile and

kinaesthetic values in the plastic arts are very important. Mrs. Langer's formula declares, however, that "virtual scene" is the primary illusion of painting; that it is purely visual, indeed that "everything that is relevant and artistically valid in a picture must be visual."⁴¹ Berenson has made a special point of emphasizing the importance of "other" values. His argument that the perception of three dimensional space necessarily involves tactile as well as visual perception is classic in this regard. It remains true, he says, "that every time our eyes recognize reality (in art), we are, as a matter of fact, giving tactile values to retinal impressions."⁴² In analyzing the powerful impression of reality in the paintings of Giotto, he writes, "Giotto's paintings, on the contrary, have not only as much power of appealing to the tactile imagination as is possessed by the objects represented--human figures in particular--but actually more."⁴³ We may conclude with Berenson that the relevant material in a painting is more than visual and therefore "virtual scene" is not a broad enough concept to embrace the essential elements of a painting.

The discussion of "virtual time" is particularly confusing to me. If a musical work only exists while it is being performed, then the sounds are occurring in time--not virtual time, but ordinary clock time. Even though a listener may be "transported" to an unawareness of time by

a symphonic work, when it is over he is aware of a passage of real time, not virtual time. And if he is aware of a passage of illusory time during the work, what sort of motion in time is this? The work of art must have a primary illusion, but which one of the many times created by each of a work's many performances is the one? If a musical composition is a "logical construction" out of its many performances, then it has no one time. If it is an object with existence independent of performances, then neither clock time nor virtual time has any meaning in it. Its real (or virtual) time will remain unperceivable, because we know music only through its performances.

Margaret Macdonald has given a similar account of "virtual gesture" in dancing.

"A dancer, e.g. does not "virtually" gesture when he moves; he does gesture. For as Petroushka he is in despair. That he is not as Nijinsky or Some is quite irrelevant. For the dancer himself is not pretending to despair; he is dancing Petroushka."⁴⁴

In Mrs. Langer's theory, the categories of primary illusions are so neat and all the arts seem to fall without hesitation or forcing into their proper place, we begin to wonder why it has seemed for so long that the various art forms were so different. The other alternative is to doubt that Mrs. Langer has provided a full account of the distinguishing features of the various arts. I agree with Morris

Weitz that the overall reductionism in her theory is untenable. The categories are just too neat!

If Mrs. Langer were to argue that most of the examples in any art form fit the primary illusion she outlines for each form, we may justifiably turn her own statement about the universal application of a true general theory on her. I am sure she feels that her theory of semblance is a true general theory, but I do not believe the facts can be grouped as tidily as she claims. Consider a further problem: some large murals are difficult enough to see in their entirety so that the eye and the mind might "take in" the mural and form an accurate semblance. What of pieces of sculpture or large buildings? Some account of memory perception would be required otherwise any possible semblance would be of a portion only of the total work of art--a contradiction surely!

About semblance, then, I feel some of the uneasiness that Margaret Macdonald felt in reading Feeling and Form. "There is too much of the logical drill sergeant about this formidable array of definitions and concepts."⁴⁵

We have now seen that in semblance the strange uniqueness of the work of art is accounted for. Also, it has become clear that in Mrs. Langer's terms a work of art is "a single, indivisible symbol, although a highly articulated

one."⁴⁶ As a prime symbol it still may not be a complete one, so it may be called an "unconsummated symbol."⁴⁷ However, this incompleteness does not jeopardize the power of the symbol to communicate its meaning because according to Mrs. Langer the work of art is charged with expressive import which cannot be separated from it. We turn now to consider briefly the general problem of "meaning" in works of art, and more particularly in relation to the account in Philosophy in a New Key.

MEANING IN WORKS OF ART

The whole first section of this study involving symbols and their functions aired the logical aspect of meaning. In the picture theory of language discussed there, the problem of meaning was specified as the problem of the relation between language and reality. This position which is often referred to as the classical conception of language, is summed up by Mrs. Langer in Philosophy in a New Key; "Even in the simplest kinds of meaning there must be at least two other things related to the term that 'means'--an object that is 'meant,' and a subject who uses the term."⁴⁸ She has pointed out clearly that there is no quality of meaning, that it is inadequate to call meaning a relation because of its very complex nature, and therefore the best definition is: meaning is a function of a term.⁴⁹

John Hospers struggled to define "meaning" and said⁵⁰ that concerning words which mean something, we state their meaning by indicating what they (the words) refer to, what they have come, by convention, to stand for. This is, he says, the main sense in which the word 'meaning' is used, but there are others: causal consequences, logical entailment, general feeling of significance, and intention. Ogden and Richards⁵¹ list sixteen such variations of meaning. We have no difficulty interpreting any of these instances in which "meaning" is used, but what of meaning in works of art? Hospers says, "The case is different with 'What is the meaning of a work of art?' When this question is asked, I am not sure what the inquirer is asking for."⁵² Mrs. Langer claims to have removed the confusion surrounding this question. Since works of art have a symbolic function quite similar in many ways to words and sentences, we need only attend to the symbols until we perceive the forms of feeling to which **they** refer. . Since the logical form of the semblance corresponds to that of the feeling which it expresses, we need only come to understand the symbol. The process of "understanding" is not quite as easy as it sounds, but we at least know what it means to know the meaning of a word-symbol. The difference between discursive and presentational symbols, particularly the fact that the latter have no connotation, necessitates a different assignment of "meaning." But, in Mrs. Langer's

account she is not confused by the question, "What is the meaning of a work of art?" She infers that the whole concept of meaning in both the symbolic modes identified in her theory, is rooted in the picture theory of meaning. The difference, basically, in the two types of symbolism is this: discursive symbols mirror reality more or less exactly, while presentational symbols are only logically isomorphic with reality. This means that propositions picture facts--specifically identifiable, concrete facts. Presentational symbols mirror the forms of feeling, i.e. the form of certain lines, colors, sounds, etc. mirrors the forms of certain subjective human states. The analogy of the form of the river bed, and the form of the river currents conveys the idea of "logical picturing" as it is intended here.

Hospers suggests that if the word "meaning" is to be retained in speaking of the arts it must "be defined somewhat as follows: a work of art means to us whatever effects (not necessarily emotions) it evokes in us; a work which has no effects on us means nothing to us, and whatever effects it does evoke constitute its meaning for us."⁵³ Mrs. Langer would like to avoid the private nature of such a definition, but cannot fully accomplish this because presentational symbols are "unconsummated symbols." Several of the critics of her theory have neglected to notice this

refinement in her position. They have thought that the picture theory of meaning applied as strictly to presentational symbols as to word-symbols in Mrs. Langer's account. However, in discussing significance in music she criticizes Hanslick's view that music and emotion have only a formal similarity, and that any further interpretation is illegitimate. Her argument claims that Hanslick and other formalists mistake the relation between music and emotion for musical meaning rather than a relation of musical symbols.⁵⁴ They were close, she says, but came to the wrong conclusion. "Music has all the earmarks of a true symbolism, except one: the existence of an assigned connotation. It is a form that is capable of connotation, and the meanings to which it is amenable are articulations of emotive, vital, sentient experiences. But its import is never fixed."⁵⁵

Even a living language shows the same "growing" tendencies that music demonstrates, with the difference that much of language exists in a set vocabulary, while in music there is no vocabulary.

That music and all presentational forms have "import" though not strictly an assignable meaning is made explicit in the following lines:

"What is true of language, is essential in music: music that is invented while the composer's mind

is fixed on what is to be expressed is apt not to be music. It is a limited idiom, like an artificial language, only even less successful; for music at its highest, though clearly a symbolic form, is an unconsummated symbol. Articulation is its life, but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression. The actual function of meaning, which calls for permanent contents, is not fulfilled; for the assignment of one rather than another possible meaning to each form is never explicitly made. Therefore music is "Significant Form" in the peculiar sense of "significant" which Mr. Bell and Mr. Fry maintain they can grasp, or feel, but not define; such significance is implicit, but not conventionally fixed."⁵⁶

There is a strange use of words here. How can music be at one time clearly symbolic and yet be an unconsummated symbol? This is a problem which involves the whole question of the legitimacy of the presentational symbol. Consider the meaning of "significant form" again. If forms in and of themselves are significant, (indeed they must be so to be classed as artistic in Mrs. Langer's terms) then surely the kind of significance that belongs to them is of an unusual kind. The significance lies much deeper than the fact that a still-life represents oranges, table, vase and cutlery. The concept of semblance is relevant. In a "semblance" of the objects represented in a picture, more of value is generated (providing the picture is a genuine work of art) than would have accrued from a mere assemblage of the objects themselves. Something in the way they are put together, in the artist's distortion of reality, creates

a work of art which has artistic significance; it has "import" as an organic unity. There is nothing mysterious about this phenomenon. Artistic import is inherent in the sensuous construct we call the work of art. And on many occasions, even in Mrs. Langer's account, artistic import is synonymous with "meaning."

It is true that in viewing paintings and sculptures we are often becoming hopelessly entangled between our interest in represented objects and interest in the visual or verbal structures that depict them. In music this problem hardly arises. And I believe it is fundamentally a concern over this confusion that prompts the so-called Formalists to insist that we attend only to the structure of the arts. In an earlier quotation from Feeling and Form⁵⁷ the simple buzzing sounds of speech were found to be charged with meaning. The meaning referred to is not that of representation of objects in nature. All aspects of an art object, that of representation among them, enter into the semblance, and the significance is, then, something which is generated by this semblance or borne by it. In art the case is slightly different. We have, according to Mrs. Langer, unconsummated symbols, significant forms without "conventional significance."⁵⁸ This phrase--significant form without conventional significance--is as confusing as a symbolic form composed of an unconsummated symbol. The sense being conveyed is perhaps best explained by the phrase

"articulation is its (the work of art) life, but not assertion."⁵⁹ Thus, it might be possible that something could have its own inner meaning and significance without endeavoring to express anything. Indeed works of art seem to have this quality about them. The question then arises again, as it has so many times in this study, "Can a work of art, with the unique qualities we find it to have, be any kind of a symbol?"

Now, having saddled the horses, positioned the dogs, and mounted, we might start the search for the fox--which, in our present context, is this very question, "Are there presentational symbols?"

IS THE WORK OF ART A SYMBOL?

In all aesthetic theories the central concept--the point of most concern--is the thing which, for some reason or other, is called a work of art. All questions that relate to aesthetics are directly about the aesthetic object. Primarily these objects are created objects, the result of human endeavor, the work of an artist; but they need not be! Most aestheticians claim that their investigations involve some objects that are not the works (creations) of artists. Certain aspects of nature viewed in certain ways are often included in the field of aesthetics

if they generate an "aesthetic experience." We need not pursue this problem further. It is sufficient merely to indicate the divergence of opinion and then state that Mrs. Langer's theory is committed to the view that all works of art are "created." They are all, without exception, she says, the product of symbolic transformation. Works of art being presentational forms, are strictly of human creation. A complication arises here, however. If we say, as Mrs. Langer does, that aesthetic objects are significant forms, then, if the object really "signifies" something, it may legitimately be called a kind of symbol; it thereby means or expresses something beyond itself. But Mrs. Langer does not want to allow this definition of "significant," as we have seen. Let us, for the sake of clarity of this point, apply the word "significant" to so-called aesthetic objects in nature. Clive Bell's statement that significant form is the one quality common to all works of visual art,"⁶⁰ could easily be applied to objects in nature. Mrs. Langer's paraphrase of Bell could also apply: "Significant Form, (which really has significance) is the essence of every art; it is what we mean by calling anything 'artistic.'"⁶¹ However, she intends that these forms which are significant be related to human feelings, and therefore "art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling." Aesthetic objects in nature could not signify feelings but they might

certainly be significant. A beautiful red sunset may be aesthetically pleasing, and at the same time signify the approach of night and the prospect of a windy morrow. As an aesthetic object it has significance in this sense. But Mrs. Langer wants to restrict the use of "significance" to instances in which the form of the aesthetic object stands for or signifies a certain inner state of a creative artist. This amounts to saying that a beautiful red sunset may be pleasing, but to be aesthetically relevant it must be significant. The benefit of this notion is that it accounts for objects of experience which may be unpleasant and yet aesthetically meaningful; all such instances of aesthetic experience follow from perceiving an aesthetic object which is a significant form. If Mrs. Langer accepted this account of significant form, her theory could apply to nature objects. But if she maintains that the work of art has a symbolic function she is committed to the view that the field of aesthetics deals only with the works of artists, and mother nature, in spite of her fine technical ability, has not sufficient subjective identity to get a "union card." We can draw no other conclusion when she says that "a work of art differs from all other beautiful things in that it is 'a glass and a transparency'--not, in any relevant way, a thing at all, but a symbol."⁶²

It is important to realize the basic premises on which Mrs. Langer builds. The claim that the mind forms presentational symbols, as well as the other more familiar discursive kind, and that all aesthetic objects are formed in this way, forces the resultant theory of art to limit aesthetic considerations to creations of the mind. It is a minor point, but one well worth bearing in mind when a final assessment of the relevance and scope of this symbolic theory is made in relation to aesthetics.

Let us suppose that the work of art is a symbol, a product of the mind; how does it differ from Freud's psychoanalytic symbols which are also products of inner tensions. Dream symbols are certainly significant--at least the whole of psychoanalytic theory and practice is based on the assumption that they are. By 1956 Mrs. Langer was less willing to say that works of art are actually symbols of a kind. She was more inclined to say that "the work of art as a whole...is more like a symbolic function than like anything else."⁶³ This is a shift in emphasis that would not have been tolerated during the writing of the two earlier books in which her theory is set forth. The essential difference in dream symbols and works of art is that the former are studied, dissected, related individually and in groups to the patient's past experience. In art Mrs. Langer allows no such analysis. Individual figures, lines, colors, tones

or gestures must not be considered in isolation as if each one had its own symbolic meaning. We must remember that only the "semblance" has "import" or, in the restricted sense specified, only the semblance has "meaning." We may conclude that works of art are not at all like the symbols of dreams in the Freudian sense, though they both stem from inner feelings.

What of symbolic elements in art objects? Would they not serve like the symbols in a dream? The symbolism which is attached as an ornamental feature in a work of art is usually of a direct, obvious kind. The carved symbols decorating a church, the morality and life symbols on memorials, are symbolic because they too have a certain function --they refer to something else. An account of these symbolic elements functioning inside a larger symbol may be possible, but Mrs. Langer wants to avoid such a diffuse reference in order to maintain the logical congruence between the form of the semblance and the forms of the feelings symbolized. This necessitates thinking of the aesthetic object as one indivisible symbol. Whitehead's definition of symbolism is not being denied here. He wrote that, "The human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience. The former set of components are the 'symbols,' and the latter set

constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols."⁶⁴ Mrs. Langer is not refuting this definition by saying that symbolic designs on a church facade are non-symbolic. She is merely saying that as individual elements they contribute nothing to the aesthetic experience except as they are fused into a semblance. She is therefore claiming much more than that symbols i.e. decorations on a church, are identifiable in works of art; the work of art is itself a symbol. This is almost an espousal of the Formalist view concerning the relevance of "content" materials in works of art.

Mrs. Langer manages to give the theory an interesting twist. Roger Fry argues⁶⁵ that symbolism has no connection with the aesthetic qualities of a work of art. Since symbolism of the direct and obvious kind is not a direct contributory factor in the creation of an art object but only relates as expressive content, these elements have nothing to do with strictly aesthetic values. Mrs. Langer agrees with Fry that the pascal lamb carved in the facade of a church has little relevance (she cannot say that it 'has no relevance'), and adds that the whole church, as an architectural work of art is a unified , untranslatable symbol. Fry can hardly say that the church as a unified whole has no connection with its aesthetic qualities. Nevertheless, Fry's point denies the validity of the expressive theory on which Mrs. Langer's symbolic thesis is based. He denies that the semblance of formal qualities is a symbol.

We may safely conclude that Mrs. Langer is dead serious in claiming that works of art are symbols--not merely that they contain symbolic elements as do dreams, or that the symbolic function is very like the function of a work of art. Her later comments may suggest a sort of metaphorical interpretation of "symbol" when applied to art objects but in the two major statements of her position she endeavors to maintain a literal interpretation consistent with the definition of presentational symbol outlined in the first few chapters of Philosophy in a New Key.

A. WORKS OF ART AND LANGUAGE

Let us review briefly the significant ways in which works of art are unlike language in Mrs. Langer's theory. Some discussion of this distinction was included in the section on "Presentational Symbols" when we compared an artist's private language with ordinary language. The present concern is to draw the distinction in connection with works of art.

1) Language has permanent units of meaning and these are defineable. Aesthetic objects have nothing of the sort. A symphony is made up of elements, none of which have distinct meanings aesthetically, and as a consequence the themes or movements of a symphony only have meaning as they are related to the whole artistic creation.

2) In language the units (word-symbols) can be joined according to certain rules, to make larger meaningful units (sentences), but in art there are no rules for uniting parts of one work with another, or of combining a number of paintings to create a larger one. It may be argued that an expansive wall in an art gallery on which many paintings are hung in an artistic pattern provides a pleasing aesthetic impression, particularly if the wall is viewed from a sufficient distance so that the pattern can be perceived as a whole. But this is no refutation of the point made above because the paintings might as well be colored towels pinned to the wall, as far as their contribution to the pattern is concerned. Works of art are said to be unique "wholes"; their constituent parts cannot be combined to create other works without destroying the meaning or the original art object in the process. The tiles of a mosaic may be dissembled and reconstructed into a different pattern, but no one would want to claim that the dissembled pattern is present in some meaningful form in the new mosaic. The elements or materials of works of art have no individual significance, and therefore are not transferable.

3) Language has only general reference "so that it requires non-verbal acts, like pointing, looking, or emphatic voice-inflexions, to assign specific denotations to its terms."⁶⁶ Art objects have only specific reference.

4) Presentational symbols are perceived differently than discursive symbols. Since words have individual meanings, language conveys meanings successively or discursively. Meaning in art is conveyed only through perceiving and understanding the whole object, and even then, as we have seen, the meaning reference lacks connotation, and therefore lacks "meaning" in the strict sense of the word. It is clear in Mrs. Langer's account, however, that "the import of an art symbol cannot be built up like the meaning of a discourse, but must be seen in toto first; that is, the 'understanding' of a work of art begins with an intuition of the whole presented feeling."⁶⁷ This is as we might expect, considering earlier claims that the work as a unit is the only aspect of it that refers or signifies or "means." For further clarification of this point, notice the following comment:

"The meanings given through languages are successively understood...the meanings of all other symbolic elements that compose a larger articulate symbol are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations within the total structure. Their very functioning as symbols depends on the fact that they are involved in a simultaneous integral presentation."⁶⁸

(Note the evidence in this statement that it is justifiable to say that works of art have "meaning" in Mrs. Langer's terms, although earlier she specified that they do not have meaning.)

The idea of "semblance" is designed to clarify the "simultaneous integral presentation" spoken of above. The account given in Philosophy in a New Key is beset with inconsistencies on this point. From the point of view of the observer, a word-symbol and a work of art must each be perceived and understood as a unit. Each refers to a more or less specific thing. To try to distinguish elements in an art object is like shuffling the letters of a word; neither the elements nor the letters have meaning except as a whole word or whole art object. From the point of view of the artist, on the other hand, the work of art is a composite thing: a building may have identifiable sections, and beautiful facades, a concerto involves three movements, and quite specifically requires for full comprehension, the recognition of solo and ensemble parts. One thing certain, neither a building nor a concerto can be perceived all at one time. And this I believe is what leads Mrs. Langer to say that understanding is of the "whole," and is therefore delayed until the whole has been perceived. Albeit, some meaning must be given to the identifiable elements in a building and concerto. It just is not adequate to say that the exposition of a concerto, for example, is aesthetically irrelevant. Philosophy in a New Key provides little satisfaction except to say that the parts have meaning as a united symbol through their "simultaneous integral presentation." Paul Welsh suggests that the difficulty lies in

confusing "meaning" and aesthetic properties. It is perhaps true that aesthetic properties are understood only through considering the work of art as a whole. But they are not meanings because understanding does not mean "conceiving." Only by calling aesthetic properties "meanings," Welsh says, can a work of art be converted into a symbol.⁶⁹

Another obvious difficulty arises with poetry. The work of art, we are told, is a unique, unanalyzable symbol, and conversely language is discursive, but surely then, a poem must be both. The concept of semblance attempts to solve these problems. My point here is that in spite of these difficulties, Mrs. Langer had to maintain the organic unity of the work of art, if she was to hold that a work of art is a symbol. Lines or stanzas within a poem have no aesthetic relevance or meaning taken in isolation. I do not think this position can be maintained, but it is, nevertheless, an essential point in this symbolic theory.

5) In one other important respect, the work of art differs from language. In discursive communication we are able to point beyond the symbols to the things they refer to, and can therefore teach the meaning of words in this way. A work of art, on the contrary, cannot be separated from that for which it stands, and therefore it has specific meaning only. "A symbol...cannot really be said to refer to

something outside itself."⁷⁰ Surely there is a confusion here. How can something act as a symbol, unless it symbolizes something or refers beyond itself? Yet we are told that "refer" is not the right word for a symbol's characteristic function. Where a symbol does not have an accepted reference, the use of it is not properly "communication." Yet its function is expressiveness. We say there is a resemblance between the tensions built up by a series of sounds organized in a dynamic pattern, and the tensions either felt or imagined by a composer. These two things have the same logical form, though it cannot be said, according to Mrs. Langer, that one refers to the other. An apple in a Cezanne still-life is a figment of the imagination; it does not refer to a real apple. This is correct. But what kind of a symbol is one which does not refer? We may remember that "it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly 'mean'," and may still wonder what the conception is about. "Symbol" is nearly always used to denote reference. Even dream symbols are assumed to have implicit reference which is made explicit through psychoanalysis. The reference of a symbol may be to an imaginary object, but by definition if there is no reference there is no symbol. And surely, a symbol that merely refers to itself, is a contradiction.

Various suggestions have been made by Mrs. Langer's critics, all of which involve abandoning the idea of a work of art being a symbol. But this cannot be done without abandoning the major and most vigorous part of Philosophy in a New Key. Remove "symbolic transformation" and there remains merely another expressive theory of art wrestling with the traditional problems and with little hope of success. The unique feature of this theory, and its most interesting point, lies in the claim that the work of art is literally a symbol of a kind, and yet, I cannot see how this can be maintained.

B. MUSIC

Consider Mrs. Langer's favorite example--music. It is "a tonal analogue of the emotive life." This means that music is an expressive form, that it is not a language because music lacks a vocabulary, and it has no defineable meaning because it lacks specific reference. Though music says nothing, it shows a great deal. Basically a musical composition is an arrangement of tonal structures which are logically similar to the forms of feeling: of growth, attenuation, conflict, resolution. Music, like all other art forms, has "import" and this is what makes it significant. As a significant form it expresses forms of experience which discursive forms cannot express. It is these aspects of the "inner life" which the composer "means" by his music, and

Mrs. Langer says, it is this reference to the inner life which we find valuable.

It is appropriate to ask just what it is that we hold to be valuable about a musical composition. Do we hold the work of art--the sound of the music--the symbol--to be of value? Or is it the "inner life" which is "meant" by the music which is valuable? Mrs. Langer answers yes to each of these questions. The work of art is valued in and of itself because it is experienced immediately in one aesthetically rewarding intuition. But, on the other hand, as a symbol, the work of art "means" the subjective state with which it is correlated. This too has value, though it is experienced only mediately through the symbol (heard musical sounds). Between these two positions one must choose. Aesthetic-value properties can be attributed only to one thing, either to the art object itself, or to the "inner life." I feel definitely that it is the thing, the art object we value; that the effort to account for the creation of it confuses the essential value judgment by claiming that since it is a certain emotional state in the artist which prompts him to create, this inner stimulation is the cause of, and therefore of more value than, the incidental effect of that cause. Notice however, that an auctioneer at a sale of paintings never refers to the subjective states of the artist in recommending a certain valuable painting. The work of art has intrinsic

value in its lines, colors, relations of forms, etc. If art objects have a symbolic function, it is the symbol itself that we value aesthetically, and this promotes an inconsistency because a symbol should direct out attention to the thing of value, not to itself.

Mrs. Langer uses pure design as a test case of her theory of art. Decorative designs too, are presentational forms, she says. They are logically congruent with the feelings symbolized; they express vital rhythms, and project these into visible shapes and colors. It seems inconsistent, but it is true nevertheless, we are told, that both the design and the feeling may have motion and rest, rhythmic unity and wholeness at one time. The design involves no real movement, but "borders must move forward and grow as they move." Presentational symbols have this capacity. The advancing line of the design, because it is a logical picture of movement, generates the illusion of real movement --of growth. "All motion in art is growth, not growth of something pictured, like a tree, but of lines and spaces."⁷¹ This is as clear as her account becomes, and at this point it seems quite persuasive. Real motion is said to be logically related to linear form, and the perception of line is full of the idea of motion. This much of the theory is strictly "formalistic." The main problem now is to determine whether "linear form" as in design is logically congruent

with feelings; whether the sounds of music can actually be said to correspond logically to certain feelings.

Peirce's analogy of the map has relevance here. There is a certain relational similarity between the items on a map, and the territory corresponding to it. Peirce says that the map is iconic with what it maps; that the map is a sign or symbol of the territory, and this means that the two are logically alike. But what of the decorative design? The swirling, moving line of the design is supposed to be logically like feelings which have the same relational resemblance. In music, sounds produce aural tensions and resolutions, but are these in any way like a map of our feelings? Mrs. Langer's theory is weakest at this point, it seems to me. There is no obvious congruence between the relations that are inherent in a work of art and the relations between thoughts, emotions, etc. in a composite inner state of feeling. The notion of logical congruence is unfortunately insecure. I think that if a thoroughly satisfactory account of this point could be given, the theory that "art is the creation of forms which are symbolic of feelings" would stand.

C. CONCLUSION

Are there presentational symbols? My answer is that I do not know. And I venture to say that Mrs. Langer does not know either. At the conclusion of Feeling and Form I am

sure her answer would have been strongly affirmative. By the time the critics had had their say, she was willing to settle for much less, as we have seen. I have endeavored to point out the ways in which a work of art is unlike a legitimate symbol, and I think the differences are sufficiently numerous to assert that a work of art is not a symbol, nor is its function similar enough to that of symbols to gain any significant benefit from maintaining the analogy. The concept of presentational symbols perpetrates a gross misconception of works of art.

In the first chapter of Philosophy in a New Key, Mrs. Langer inadvertently spelled out the very problem that proves to be the limitation of her theory. "The way a question is asked limits and disposes the ways in which any answer to it--right or wrong--may be given."⁷² The fundamental questions of her theory concern what is created in art, and how it is created. These questions presuppose that the arts have a common source in the mind's formation of symbols--which may be true. Albeit, the construction of a closed heirarchy of concepts and definitions into which all art forms are forced, some to the destruction of their essential characteristics, is not an adequate theory of art.

Mrs. Langer expressed her desire to seek clarification of meanings of concepts in philosophy. Many critics

feel that she has constructed a system rather than sought for clarification of meanings. Morris Weitz's charge is that

"instead of pursuing actual specific elucidations, she invests an elaborate family of concepts--some old, some new--with unusual and difficult meanings which add up to a "theory" that she then imposes in an Hegelian fashion on the arts themselves. Her goal of clarification is obscured and defeated by her conception of philosophy as conceptual construction rather than conceptual elucidation. This is why she seeks, as 'theorists' invariably do, her many related formulae which all derive from her one, true, real definition that 'art is the creation of forms which are symbolic of feelings'."73

Regardless of the limitations of Mrs. Langer's symbolic theory of art, she has competently proclaimed "the work of a brilliant, though strangely assorted, intellectual generation--Whitehead, Russell, Wittgenstein, Freud, Cassirer ...who launched the attack on the formidable problem of symbol and meaning, and established the keynote of philosophical thought in our day."74 And if we may believe Whitehead who said that "error is the price we pay for progress," then Mrs. Langer has pushed back the horizon of aesthetic theory significantly.

CHAPTER THREE

SYMBOLISM IN ART--A RECONSTRUCTION

THE SYMBOL IN ART

In the latter part of this paper, I would like to attempt a partial reconstruction by answering two questions: 1) What role, if any, does symbolism play in art? and 2) If the work of art is not a symbol, what is it? The second question is included because to this point I have been saying only that works of art are not this or that, and I want to avoid leaving the impression that there may be no such thing as art objects.

Cassirer's theory makes good sense. The mind is a transforming instrument, turning chaotic sense experience into "things" which are then permanently recorded in the mind and memory when they are symbolized. Susanne Langer's account of this process of symbolic transformation I accept also, unreservedly. It is her arbitrary limiting of symbolism to two modes, and the resultant narrow definitions of both art and language that chafe. The collar just does not seem to fit. The tremendously wide range of aesthetic objects do not yield to the regimentation necessary to class them as presentational symbols or any other one kind of thing. Whether the aesthetic riddle will ever be solved to everyone's satisfaction, I do not know. This means that the question "What is a work of art?" may never be answered simply, and conclusively. Albeit, one thing is certain.

The work of art may not be labelled a "symbol" but symbolism is an important aspect of human behavior, an aspect which plays a significant role in art. Many of the individually distinguishable elements in works of art are symbolic in one way or another. It is necessary to be quite clear about symbolism, what it is, and the characteristics essential to it. Susanne Langer's delineation of symbolic activity is extremely helpful, but, as we have seen, she has constructed an edifice of too restricting proportions, even on a very broad foundation. We must return to the foundation itself and re-examine it briefly.

It is widely recognized that man's unique position among the animals is based on the dominance of symbols in his life. Man lives in a world not of things, but of symbols. A stone represents a god in primitive religions, a coin represents commodities in economics, flags or slogans represent nations. And yet, there is general disagreement about symbolism. This is a paradoxical situation. Symbolism, however defined, is a basic attribute of human behavior, and yet, what is it? In one place we read that in symbolism we have the keynote of all humanistic problems, and in another that there is wide divergence as to what symbolism really means.

Thomas Carlyle cautions that no civilization is well advised to discount the importance of symbols. In Sartor

Resartus he said that "it is in and through symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being: those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognize symbolic worth, and prize it the highest."¹ Alfred N. Whitehead chose to reiterate this point in Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect. The theme of the lectures that comprise this book involves the need for having reverence for symbols, while maintaining the freedom to revise them. It becomes very clear in his exposition that society is held together by acceptance of and reverence for, its symbols. Symbols of the kind referred to here, express values, human values.

Without becoming involved in the way symbols are created or perceived, I think we can say that symbolism entails a relation between two different kinds of experience, one somehow pointing to the other. Whitehead felt that a definition along very broad lines was necessary. His own definition says that "the mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and useages, respecting other components of its experience. The former set of components are the 'symbols,' and the latter set constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols."² He is here confirming the natural tendency we have to formalize, and thereby understand and perhaps communicate our experience. Symbols therefore, represent

some content. They refer beyond themselves to other experiences--to other thoughts or things. This characteristic is typical of languages, but not of all languages. The mating cry of an animal is certainly expressive, and communicates to his mate a state of feeling. This is easily classed as language, but the cry, though expressive, is not a symbol. It does not connote a "thing." Again, we find that some animals will warn each other of danger by emitting certain audible sounds. However, these warnings carry no content. They do not specify what the danger is. Human language, and symbolism in general, is representative of some content or other.

Symbols are perhaps "freely created" as von Bertalanffy has specified.³ By this he means to distinguish a symbol which has "no biologically enforced connections between the sign and the thing connoted," from conditioned reflexes in which a relation between a signal and a thing signalled is imposed from outside, i.e. a child once or twice burned by fire is conditioned to avoid a flame. This much of Mrs. Langer's signal-symbol distinction must be imposed, I feel.

I do not think that anything included in the broad definition of symbolism above is contrary to Mrs. Langer's definition. It is incomplete, admittedly, because, for one thing, I have avoided saying that in referring beyond

themselves, symbols may lead the mind to things which can never be specified--nor that symbols can refer to themselves. On one point she would insist on further clarification, however. Whitehead's broad definition and the description I have added to it fails to distinguish as clearly between signals and symbols as Mrs. Langer claims is necessary. It seems to me there are many occasions when it is impossible to distinguish between signals that indicate and symbols that mean. A low sun in the west is a signal (or sign) that night approaches, and it is also appropriate to say that the low sun means it will soon be dark. One component of our experience (low sun) elicits a belief respecting another component of our experience, based on our having previously witnessed the sun go down. The low sun may then be called a symbol which means that night approaches. The signal-symbol distinction may be useful in distinguishing the more refined levels of symbolic activity which are uniquely human, but symbolism involves a very wide range of situations in which one thing refers to another. It is symbolism in this broad sense I plan to investigate in its relation to works of art.

To say, then, that symbolism implies a relation between two different kinds of experience, one somehow pointing to the other, easily includes the notion of non-discursive symbols--those symbols which tell us about the

experience of artists. It is implied of course, that the two kinds of experience involved must be understood and be clearly identified by the beholder, otherwise no symbolic relation exists for the beholder. Some artists do not think it necessary that symbols in works of art be recognized or understood by viewers. Robert Schumann delighted in private meanings of this kind. The meanings of symbols that are purely private contribute nothing to a work of art until they are made explicit.

Symbols may certainly refer to experiences, rather than to facts. A lyric poem which contains the words "balmy breezes" and "springtime" tells us nothing about meteorological facts, but it does tell us something about the experience of the poet--something much more than is contained in a mere expression of feeling similar to a baby's joyous outburst on a warm spring day. It is this aspect of symbolism that is employed a great deal in art.

In all the arts symbolic devices of various kinds are used. An object may be represented through the subtle imitation of its essential characteristics. The imitative thing is then a symbol referring to the object symbolized. An Indian "chicken-dance" is imitative of certain habits of the prairie chicken and therefore symbolizes these activities. In other instances an idea, custom or activity may be

symbolized by an object which is closely associated with it. A simple line drawing of the outline (characteristic shape) of the Colosseum in Rome symbolizes not only the present city and the objects in a section of the city, but also an entire by-gone age. Elements of this kind often appear in art. And again, a design or relation of shapes will often give sufficient hint of an idea or object to become a symbol of them. This device is perhaps limited to works of visual art. Critics in the formalist tradition for example, find meanings in related shapes which they claim the painter fully intended as a symbol of a certain idea. In painting this may be true. However, I do not see how such a symbolic reference could apply to all art forms. Gestures and movements in dance, and the relation of shapes created by moving human forms may achieve symbolic status by representing something or other. I do not know dance creations well enough to cite an example, but the possibility seems quite likely in that form, though not in forms such as literature, poetry and music.

In spite of the importance of symbolism in art, it must be made clear that symbolism as such is not the only element that makes a work of art artistic. It is not only the representation of apple, vase and table, that makes a Cezanne still-life artistic, but what he does with these things. Conscious symbolism may express an idea or create

an image, but aesthetic properties are not solely dependent on conscious symbolism or representation. Aesthetic properties depend on the artist's disposition of the elements of the work. My point is that one of these elements may be, and often is, a symbolic element. As material for expression, symbolism is very important in art. By its suggestiveness aesthetic qualities are often brought into being.

The point I am stressing does not seem to be inconsistent with Mrs. Langer's views stated in a talk given at the Austin Riggs Psychiatric Centre in 1956.

"All such (symbolic) elements, however, are genuine symbols; they have meanings, and the meanings may be stated. Symbols in art connote holiness, or sin, or rebirth, womanhood, love, tyranny, and so forth. These meanings enter into the work of art as elements, creating and articulating its organic form, just as its subject-matter--fruit in a platter, horses on a beach, a slaughtered ox, or a weeping Magdalen--enter into its construction. Symbols used in art lie on a different semantic level from the work that contains them. Their meanings are not part of its import, but elements in the form that has import, the expressive form. The meanings of incorporated symbols may lend richness, intensity, repetition or reflection or a transcendent unrealism, perhaps an entirely new balance to the work itself. But they function in the normal manner of symbols: they mean something beyond what they present in themselves."⁴

It is unfortunate that more discussion of this kind did not appear in the major statement of Mrs. Langer's theory. It would have put her concept of symbolism in a more realistic light. But then, the function of symbolic

elements in art would have contrasted unfavorably with the concept of the organic unit--the work of art--as a symbol. It is not clear how she would have accounted for the different semantic levels spoken of, and it seems to me this is the crucial point. I have argued throughout this study that symbolic function is only understandable on the one level--the level of genuine symbols. I maintain that if all symbols have meaning, these meanings must contribute to the import of the work of art in a more direct fashion than their being merely "elements in the form that has import." It makes no sense to say with Mrs. Langer that it is unnecessary to ask what the Hound of Heaven or The Hollow Men stand for. She claims that it matters not whether the interpretation of such elements is clear. The reader might comprehend the total poetic image without understanding the symbolic elements involved. This I cannot see. If the poetic image the beholder is expected to comprehend is supposed to correlate with the form of feeling of the creative artist, then the symbolic elements must play as important a part for the beholder as they did for the artist in his creative hour. Thus, a statement exemplifying an artist's conscious use of symbolic elements would be a refutation of Mrs. Langer's claim, and a positive account of the place of symbols in art. I have chosen three art forms, each quite different in nature, to verify my point: poetry, dance, and music.

A. POETRY AND SYMBOLISM

Poetic art as a whole has always been a difficult form to force into the symbolic mode. Susanne Langer endeavored to account for its primary quality by saying that poetry is not based on words, but on the images which they evoke. C. W. Morris had difficulty in claiming that verbal art is iconic. The main problem lies in the fact that poetry can be any one or all of three different things: language, image, or idea. Word-symbols are essential, certainly, but some poetry is little more than language, or sound spoken for its own sake. The modern trend toward abstraction has made poetry more objective, in the sense that the feelings of the poet are objectified through the sound of the words rather than through their meaning. The literary form in this case is being used for something other than the communication of ideas. It becomes a device which is employed for its own sake; value therefore is present in the language alone. The objectification of space in Cubist painting has therefore this parallel movement in poetry. Language used in this way is rarely symbolic in making reference to things, or other works of poetic art. As a matter of fact, poetry composed of language sounds alone, is very much like music--at least its appeal is more or less strictly auditory.

Poetry, most of it, employs images; it relies on mental pictures to convey its import. In communicating an image to the mind a poet uses language as a discursive symbolic medium, though with added poetic touches. A poet is judged to a certain extent according to the images he creates, but his primary duty--that which makes him a poet --is to use discursive language poetically. This means making skillful use of metaphor. It also involves having a keen sense of word relationship. Words must convey, not only the ideas and must not only conjure up the images intended, they must sound appropriate, poetic, artistic. A poet constructs discursive symbols into poetic images consciously and purposefully, and many times the images created become symbolic due to their use in the poem. The image of parched, sterile land in The Waste Land⁵ is supposed to direct the mind to meaningless, sterile, hollow lives. Lines such as "Then a damp gust bringing rain" are supposed to produce the opposite image. Drought and sterility, thunder and rain, are more than mere artistic images in this poem, they are symbolic, they refer beyond themselves to ideas and feelings that could hardly be expressed in direct discursive terms. An image of thunder and rain may be said to have a metaphorical function in The Waste Land context, but notice this distinction: metaphor is a linguistic device in which something that is difficult to name or specify is described as something else, something analogous. We say one thing

and mean another, and expect to be understood to mean the other. In other words, a metaphor, taken literally, means two things: that which is said, and that which is intended. A symbol, on the other hand, means only one thing--that which is intended, and a metaphor used consistently enough times usually becomes a symbol. Our minds move directly to what is intended. We are not aware of the second and more literal meaning of the words. The "dry land" and the "sound of water over the rocks" images have such extensive use in literary works, their metaphorical function has been superseded by a symbolic function. Many such images are present in good poetry.

Now and then an image or figure in a work of art becomes symbolic though the artist had no such conscious intention. Falstaff's relation to Prince Hal in the "Henry" plays posed a problem for Shakespeare, not because of any direct relationship that had developed between the two characters, but because Falstaff symbolized a very gross, earthy and yet entertaining element in the plays and in life. Members of the audience who enjoyed Falstaff saw in him either their own drunken, lecherous selves, or their secret desire to live as freely. Shakespeare had difficulty removing this symbol without removing public interest in the plays at the same time.

D. H. Lawrence created another apt example of unconscious symbolism in Twilight in Italy. This symbol is unconscious to the reader at the time it appears, and becomes meaningful only in the course of the novel. A Bavarian peasant has carved a crucifix which the author reports seeing in the mountains. The Christ looked like one of the peasants of that area. This wooden figure, because it resembles the local people, becomes in the course of the story, symbolic of the peasants, of their struggle for survival in their remote, uncooperative area of the Alps. The tortured figure is somehow symbolic of the endless, back-breaking toil required to eek out an existence there. The figure was also symbolic of the hardy determination of the peasants.

"Plain, almost blank in his soul, the middle-aged peasant of the crucifix resisted unmoving the misery of his position. He did not yield. His soul was set, his will was fixed. He was himself, let his circumstances be what they would, his life fixed down."⁶

This particular crucifix and the figure upon it assume importance far beyond the mere account of their coexistence at a meeting of paths in the Alps.

Those who would like to account for poetic works as strictly an interplay of images, have great difficulty classifying the last few stanzas of The Hollow Men as poetic.

These stanzas do not generate images, they involve ideas; not an interplay of picture images, but an interplay of concepts. There is no opportunity here for symbolic treatment. An idea can hardly serve as a symbol for another idea. Word-symbols in this case, relate ideas to one another. Notice how impossible it is to deny the poetic use of discursive language in poetry. If the total poem as a unit is a presentational symbol, the images and ideas in that "presentation" have only reached the mind through language.

In many poetic works direct reference is made to other literary works, and the value of the unity of a poem is greatly dependent on this additional reference. Poets, perhaps more than any other artists, are great borrowers. This is no sign of weakness. The ability to make reference to another's work, thus eliciting the mood, character and situation of it, is a sign of strength, a sign of one's mastery of the literature.

T. S. Eliot is perhaps the finest example of a "borrowing" poet today. All his works refer so widely that only the most erudite readers comprehend the full significance of some lines. The principle of literary allusion as employed in Eliot's poetic works is simply the principle of symbolic reference. A few words, carefully chosen, and skilfully used, will direct the attention of the knowledge-

able reader to a whole world of ideas, feelings and images. Such a phrase then has become a symbol. The line "I had not thought death had undone so many"⁷ elicits a host of images and impressions from Dante's Inferno, to those who recognize the line. It is important here, as with any thing, that it be recognized as making reference to something else, otherwise it will not serve as a symbol.

One of the most striking examples of symbolism in The Waste Land is the use of the lines from Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. All the excitement of thoughtless, impetuous love characteristic of the first part of this opera is drawn into focus by these lines:

"Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu.
Mein irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?"

Eight lines later, and following the faded hope of the hyacinth girl, Eliot adds one devastating line from Tristan depicting the outcome of such impetuosity:

"Od' und leer das Meer"⁸

What consummate artistry it is to spin the intricate web of the tale of Tristan and Isolde around the simple hyacinth girl!

An essential point needs emphasizing. The recognition of Eliot's reference to Wagner is essential to an understanding of his meaning. There is immediate aesthetic value in perceiving the relationship created, and this is accomplished through symbolism. The few lines become symbolic of the Tristan and Isolde relationship. The image of this classic tale heightens the immediate image of Eliot's poem. For some people, the impression may be intensified even further with the recall of Wagner's musical setting of the lines quoted, and of the entire love affair. Eliot has thus used a powerful symbol. He may have created the symbol himself, if he were the first to use it. The lines quoted are only discursively symbolic (as all words are) in their original setting. But once isolated, they become symbolic of the scene and situation from which they are extracted. The line "Od' und leer das Meer," particularly has served many times to make similar reference. It is a tried and proven symbol.

The employment of symbolism in poetry can hardly be denied. I maintain, in addition, that it is essential to a full appreciation of The Waste Land that the reader recognize symbolism of this kind, otherwise he is not comprehending Eliot's intended meaning, which would mean, surely, that he has not grasped the import of the work.

B. CLASSICAL BALLET AND SYMBOLISM

The symbolic function of bodily movements in the dance is well attested. Gesture is one of the most natural forms of expression, and when it is prolonged, with repetitive elements and thus conforms to a definite rhythm, the dance results. Many present day ceremonial habits derive from earlier dances. Arnold Whittick endeavors to account for some of the more common bodily movements which are now symbolic, but whose original meanings are either lost or at most are vague.⁹ Modern ballet, or classical ballet as it is called, has much of the expressive purpose of the ancient ritual dance, though in ballet the dancers are acting, not living life at first hand.

A ballet choreographer employs a standard vocabulary of basic movements very much like a poet works with word-symbols. Certain movements have certain "meanings," and therefore, any ballet which is based on a story, or series of events, is able to tell the story using a kind of language. One does not have to know the language, as it were, to understand at least some of the "Swan Lake" narrative on a first viewing; an observant eye is all that is required. Even abstract dances such as "Les Sylphides" symbolize the subjective moods created by music, by imitating the responses of people experiencing such moods.

Perhaps a portion of the "vocabulary" of dancing is part of normal social intercourse. We think of kissing as expressing love and affection; shaking hands as symbolic of friendship and goodwill; and bowing or kneeling as expressive of devotion, worship, reverence and respect. The gestures of dance are a multiplication of symbolic movements of this kind.

A choreographer's responsibility is much greater than merely arranging a series of gestures to tell a story. A dance as a work of art, is not a story-telling session at all. The dance becomes artistic in the ways these symbolic elements are arranged and in the manner in which the dance is performed. This is what was meant by saying earlier that symbolism is not the sole contributory factor in the creation of a work of art. Nevertheless, once created, we find that an artist has said to himself (not consciously, of course), "I will use this color, this sound, this form, this gesture or movement because it symbolizes that idea, and I will employ that symbol in this way." A work of art is a work of art because of the latter consideration, but the necessity of content, much of which is symbolic, must not be ignored.

C. MUSIC AND SYMBOLISM

Many things related to music and its performance are often declared to be symbolic. A Stradivarius violin in

the possession of a performer is symbolic of his success, or fortune. Summer afternoon band concerts in the park may symbolize a certain aspect of community life. A membership in the Symphony Society may be a status symbol to some. None of these types of symbolism will occupy our attention here. I will deal with musical works themselves and the elements in them that reflect external ideas, that lead the mind away from the immediate musical experience to "extra-musical" values.

The composer may recognize certain things as being symbolic, which have no such connotation to the audience or performer. The literary allusion referred to in the work of T. S. Eliot may not be fully comprehended by anyone but Eliot himself; and so with the composer. On the other hand, certain aspects of a work of art may, for the beholder, refer symbolically to something of which the composer was not aware. Musical symbols can be purely personal as was mentioned in the case of Robert Schumann. Performers occasionally develop a strong association with certain works, and the music thereby gains a special symbolic significance for them. One young pianist of Polish birth with whom I am acquainted feels a close kinship to Chopin. There are strong social, political, and probably personal reasons for this particularly strong association with the music of Chopin, the polonaise and mazurka especially. In this case

a private symbolic significance exists. Such special instances of symbolism do not concern us here except insofar as they exemplify general types of symbolism.

A symbol must direct our thoughts or feelings somehow to another experience which we call its "meaning." Music certainly conforms to this requirement because we are aware of many sounds which we say have no meaning, and are therefore noise. Even a bird song has meaning and is therefore symbolic. A symphony may be recognized as "meaning" something, as referring to something beyond itself, though we may never be able to specify what that something is. At this point I am in agreement with Mrs. Langer's later view, that music does refer beyond itself, and this is very like a symbolic function. Again, we may not fully comprehend the referent of the symbol, but we may say that music is symbolic when it makes sense, when it produces a response or feeling that we find understandable. This is like a symbolic function but recall the differences, differences that are all important to the designation of a legitimate symbol, which a work of musical art is not.

Composers are also borrowers, though perhaps to a lesser degree than poets. In the days of Bach and Handel it was customary to import whole movements of the work of another, but this practice, I suspect, had no symbolic significance. As well might T. S. Eliot borrow a complete

poem from Ezra Pound to make up the missing movement of his "Four Quartets." Expressly for symbolic purposes, however, it has been customary for composers to use the ideas of others, their technical devices, or actual melodies, harmonic sequences, methods of variation, or rhythmic patterns. To those who recognize the use of such materials, the aesthetic impression is heightened. An intellectual dimension is added which contributes to the total experience, and the suggestion of another work, with all its particular qualities weaves an additional web similar to the Tristan and Isolde reference mentioned. Dvorak's American Quartet is an obvious example. Certain carefully chosen folk tunes are used to refer to the Negro people of the United States. This device invokes the impression of the folk culture of these people which is unique and richly musical, to the aid of the string quartet. However, excessive borrowing can be a curse. Mahler has been accused of making references too frequently to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Borrowings from earlier works need not use specific materials from them--the style may be imitated. Several 20th-century composers have reached back to earlier times for new ideas. How could old ideas be new? It would be new to apply a contemporary harmonic idiom to a 16th century polyphonic style. It requires great skill and artistry to bring two foreign idioms together effectively. I remember

hearing a madrigal* by a contemporary composer--as I learned later. At the time of hearing, it was an exciting experience wondering whether a new madrigal had been discovered which anticipated modern harmonies by three hundred years, or whether a modern composer had written with such consummate artistry in a 16th century form. Old ideas, styles, forms often stimulate the imagination of a composer creatively. In this they serve a symbolic function, directing the mind to a musical idiom, a style of performance, a cultural climate, or any other thought consistent with the symbolic reference. The madrigal form and the secular polyphony of which it was the flower stimulated Edmund Rubbra's creative imagination sufficiently to produce "So Sweet is Thy Discourse to Me"--the madrigal I referred to above. This simple example is representative of numerous other symbolic style references which composers are often turning to for ideas. It is important to notice that we become aware of particular styles and forms and materials through hearing music, and therefore it is through an emotional reaction to sound that the symbolic reference is made. Some prior association with the form or style imitated is essential, of course.

Another kind of symbolic musical reference requires prior association. Vocal music, dance music and music

* A madrigal is a secular part-song of the Elizabethan period.

associated with a liturgy become symbolic by association quite readily. Music which serves some function or has words associated with it generates the idea of the liturgical text or the dance or words of the song when the music is experienced on its own. J. S. Bach used this idea extensively. A chorale melody was often imported by him into a work in order to symbolize the ideas of the text. This was particularly effective in Bach's day because most members of the church congregation where Bach's music was performed were familiar with the chorale melodies and the texts sung to them. Thus, in a complicated choral passage, one voice part may lend solidity, continuity, and familiarity by singing a simple chorale melody into the total musical texture. In the midst of an instrumental passage, one instrument may introduce a chorale melody producing a remarkable "associative" effect. If we fail to hear the melody, and do not know the text of it, we miss the intended meaning, or most of it.

In a remarkable article on "Allegory in Baroque Music" Manfred Bukofzer cites many interesting examples of symbolic reference. He calls some types of symbolism simply "symbols" while others he calls "allegory" to distinguish them from purely conventional symbols. The kind of reference he has in mind is this: "We find in the music of the sixteenth century on almost every occasion when the text reads

'descendit de coelis' a descending melody, and when the text reads 'ascendit in coelum' a rising melody."¹⁰ Semi-conventional symbols of this kind are to be found in abundance in Baroque music especially. Bukofzer's delineation of them is a strong argument in favor of the view that symbolic elements contribute substantially to the total aesthetic effect. In addition to individual instances of allegory, as he calls it, he traces examples of one allegory superimposed on another within the same composition. In the cantata "And Thou Shalt Love the Lord Thy God," by J. S. Bach, five such symbolic references are proceeding simultaneously: 1) A fugue is chosen to stand for the commandment "Thou shalt love thy Lord." The comment is that "all passages of the Bible which are of dogmatic importance and contain a general commandment are set by Bach almost without exception in fugue or canon form ... The fugue and canon are evidently an allegory of law, since the fugue and canon are the most rigid forms of musical composition."¹¹

2) The words of the first Commandment are accompanied by the trumpet playing the chorale "These Are the Holy Ten Commandments," the text of which would have been well known in Bach's day. 3) This same chorale melody is taken up by the bass in augmentation, and thereby proceeds as a canon with the trumpet part. "All the values are doubled, and thereby the Ten Commandments are made the basis of the whole,

just as they are the basis of human life."¹² 4) The trumpet itself makes reference as it usually does in Bach to the majesty of God, or to the voice of God. 5) As if making mystical reference to the number ten, the chorale melody occurs ten times.

What value is there in devices of this kind in music? Some may want to argue that they have no value, but Mr. Bukofzer maintains that they add rather than detract --indeed, that aesthetic pleasure is dependent on recognizing them.

"When we recognize the fivefold complexity of meaning and hear it as a simultaneous musical unity, we experience a feeling of immense richness. As we listen, it is as though we were perpetually leaping from one meaning to another. This multiplicity in unity, this combination of spiritual and purely esthetic pleasure, appears to me unique in its intensity."¹³

Admittedly, aesthetic pleasure of a highly intellectual variety is implied here. Not all symbolic references of an intellectual nature are as directly contributive to the musical effect as this. The ingenious idea on which Schumann constructs his opus 9 piano work "Carnaval" involving the four musical letters of his own name (and incidentally "Asch" is the name of a town where he had a lady friend as well) contributes very little to the aesthetic appreciation of this work. Alban Berg employs the same technique

in his Chamber Concerto, using the names of the three most prominent composers in the atonal medium: Arnold Schonberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg (musical letters are underlined). Berg's Concerto may be enjoyed without understanding this symbolic reference, but the composer's full intention is not comprehended. In this instance, and in Schumann's "Carnaval" the musical work is intended to refer beyond itself to extra-musical ideas. Percy Scholes, in commenting on the construction of "Carnaval" says that the whole idea is very fanciful, "but good music results."¹⁴ The inference is that not all fanciful ideas produce good music, and with this point we can certainly agree.

Everyone is aware of symbolism in music of the obvious kind in which physical objects and happenings are represented by imitating the sounds associated with them. Bird songs, thunder, rushing wind, these and other sounds are easily imitated. A certain melody on a flute is not a bird song, and a loud bang and roll on a timpani is not thunder. We must say that these sounds imitate the original --that they symbolize the things they represent. Richard Strauss' imitation of the faltering heart beat of a dying man in "Death and Transfiguration" makes a very direct reference to the actual pulsation of the heart. The sound of heavy breathing is also imitated in this score. Vaughan Williams employed a very obvious, though effective symbolic

reference in his setting of the words "Lightning and Clouds" in the text of the "Benedicite." Strident, staccato, leaping sound flashes from the high soprano voices through the altos and tenors, to the basses. The blaze of light flashes momentarily and is gone, grounded in the earth. Passages as directly representative as these appear very rarely in music.

Another less obvious technique is to copy structurally the aspect of the world that is to be represented. The spritely, rippling passage for flutes which starts Smetana's "Moldau" is an excellent example of music suggesting the structure of a small quick-flowing mountain stream. Later in the same work the brook has become a broadly flowing river, which again is obvious in the structure of the music. But symbolism can be much more subtle. A natural scene not only has physical characteristics which can be copied, it evokes feeling and moods in us as well, and these can be approximated by our response to music. Somehow one feels the English countryside on hearing "Brigg Fair." The impression of the Norwegian temperament and landscape is present in the "Peer Gynt Suites." The impact of the external world on our emotional lives is somehow re-enacted in music without either detailed description or narration. The background music Vaughan Williams wrote for the movie "Scott of the Antarctic" is a remarkable example of the

power of music to symbolize a region by evoking similar impressions through music. One need not have seen the movie to see images of vast expanses of ice, and to feel the impression of external silence on hearing this music. The two pastorale symphonies in Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" and Handel's "Messiah" portray in sound the impression of the shepherds on the Judean hillside in the Christmas story. They employ different melodies, different instruments, and yet they convey the same general pastorale feeling. How do we account for this phenomenon? Susanne Langer would say, we feel a certain way about quiet hillsides, shepherds and contented sheep. We feel a certain way about certain musical sounds (although I hasten to add that there is often great divergence in the way listeners correlate sounds and feelings). Bach and Handel have organized a series of sounds which produce feelings consistent with our feeling for pastorale scenes. Mrs. Langer's main point is that there is a logical congruence between these two different, though related, feelings. On this I cannot agree. Perhaps my hesitance is cowardice. I would like to use her account in broad outline to explain why music seems to communicate emotionally, but the tight presentational theory in all its rigor seems too limiting. I prefer to account for symbolism as a relation between two kinds of experience, the one somehow pointing to the other.

Musical notation must not be neglected in our account of symbolism in music, for the written score is as symbolic as a printed novel. This aspect of music has little meaning to the audience, but it has significance for the composer, and the performer. Musical notation represents the sound of music much as written language symbolizes speech.

Perhaps our analogy should have compared musical notation with a printed dramatic work rather than a novel. Though musical notation may symbolize a work quite accurately to a skilled score reader, as far as the pitch of sounds and their duration is concerned, written music is still scarcely an exact symbolization. The experience of reading a score and hearing a performance of a work are very different experiences and always will be, no matter how expert is the reader.

Music is discursive. By its very nature its ideas (sounds) are strung out side by side like clothes on a line. It is the relationship of the "ideas" to one another that generates the tensions and resolutions so characteristic of musical art. It is a gross error to think that the time lag between the beginning and the end of a musical composition is a compromise--that ideally music should convey its meaning directly and immediately to the mind. We would thus abandon music as we would abandon language if communication by telepathy were possible. But this would be a

literal abandonment of music. It is not a language whose only value lies in acting as a symbol for the communication of ideas or feelings. Music has intrinsic value. It has import as a thing in itself. Aside from the meanings that we say it expresses, music has value. And this is not true of a real symbol. Remove all symbolic reference from the cross and there remains two pieces of wood joined together at right angles. A person must "learn" the meaning of a legitimate symbol; the symbol does not contain its own meaning. A case in point concerns a young lad who was walking with his father and, pointing to a certain building, asked, "What is that funny building with a plus sign on top?" The boy had learned a certain meaning for a certain sign, or symbol. But music does contain its own meaning, its own inherent import. Even the most unskilled listener feels in music either discomfort or pleasure or both in some alternating pattern which is naturally related to similar feelings from other experiences. From this experience follows automatically the recognition that sound has been organized for some purpose, be it ever so noble or so perverse. And therefore music has made reference beyond itself to some basic human value.

WHAT IS A WORK OF ART?

Art is many things. Ask the creative artists what it is and they have a great variety of answers. The beholders give a different set of answers. Performers give answers from both the other camps.

It is clear that art is not strictly a way of looking, nor is it a set of rules either for creating or perceiving. It is not a process of creation, nor is it an attitude of mind toward certain aspects of reality. It is not an instrument for instruction, nor is it a tool of religion or politics or any other social institution. It is not a particular quality which is inherent in certain objects, nor do art objects contain certain artistically distinguishable elements. It is not a way of interpreting, nor a thing interpreted in a certain way. It is none of these things alone, and yet, one or the other work of art seems to be involved in one way or another with all these things. That is why it is difficult to say that a work of art is any kind of a thing at all, and yet it must be. There has to be some thing to which artistic qualities adhere. What positive things can be said about these distinguishing characteristics?

A work of art is significant. It has content of some kind, and this content is organized in a pattern or order

we call its form. Art affects its creator or beholder or both in certain (or uncertain) emotional and/or intellectual ways. Art seems to be a dynamic, living something, though many art forms are outwardly static and lifeless. Works of art are unique--as unique as the individuals who create them. Art is seen in a synthesis of certain experiences of objects; these experiences may not be unique, but they seem to be when associated with the so-called art object.

Primarily, art is something--be it a series of movements, or sounds, or light impressions, or images--that heightens the awareness of its creator and beholder. Art adds to our consciousness. It sharpens our vision. It adds imaginative content to life.

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